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BROADOAK BELLS



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OXFORD. A. R. MOWBRAY.
LONDON.

J. MASTERS. SIMPKIN, MARSHALL & CO.

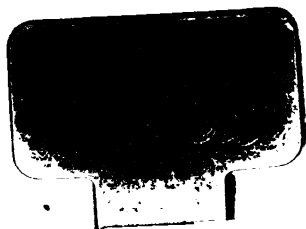


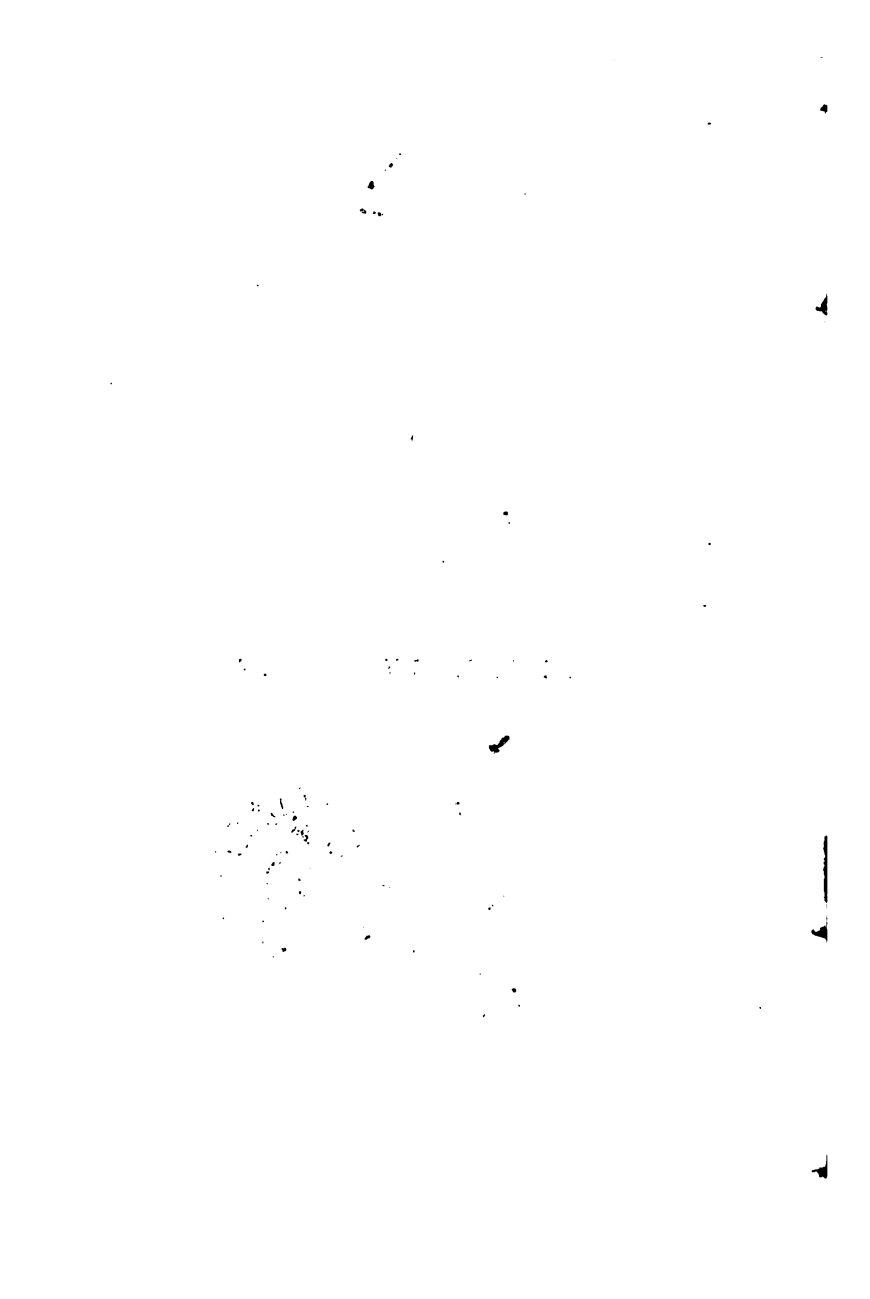
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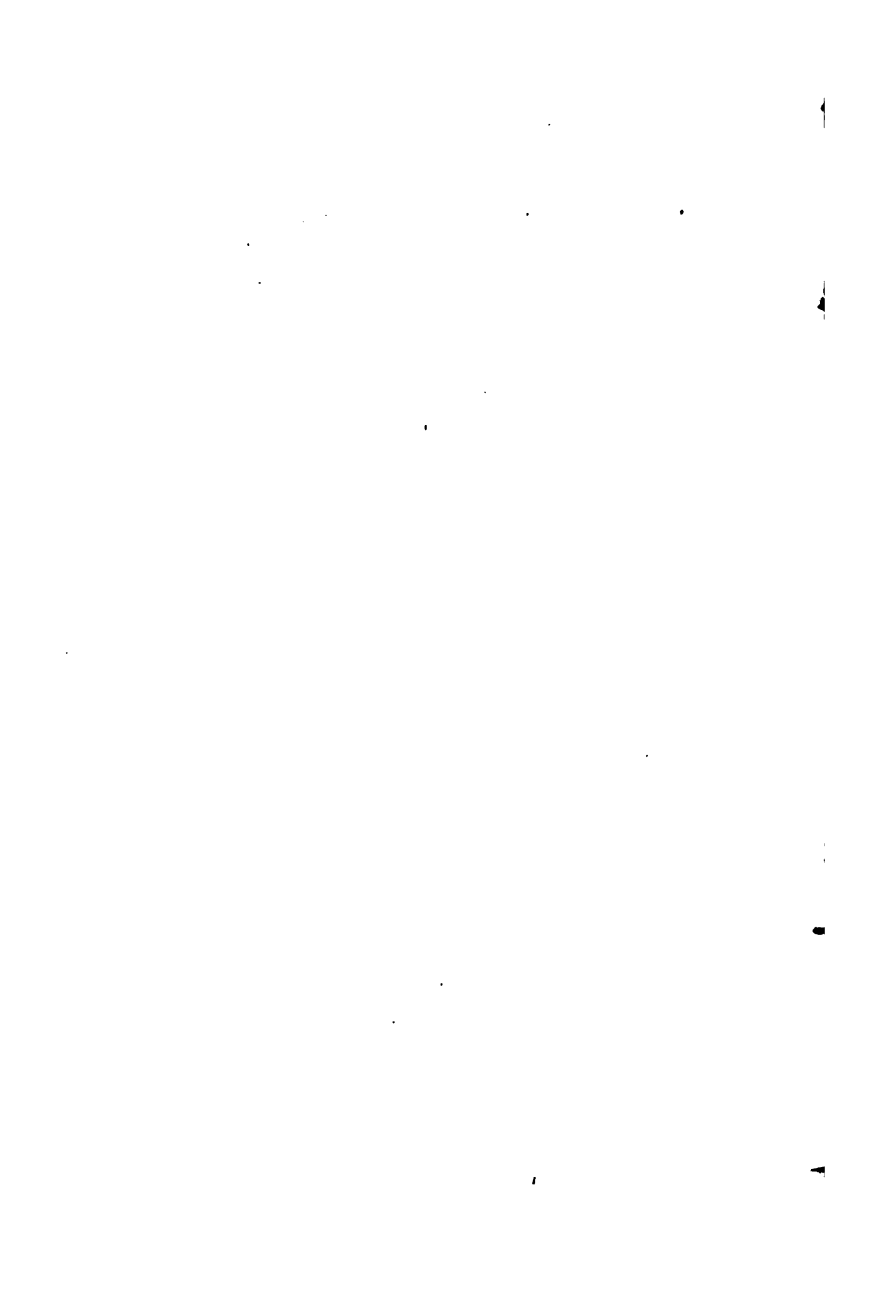


THE
BROADOAK BELLS;
A Tale for the Poor.



Oxford:
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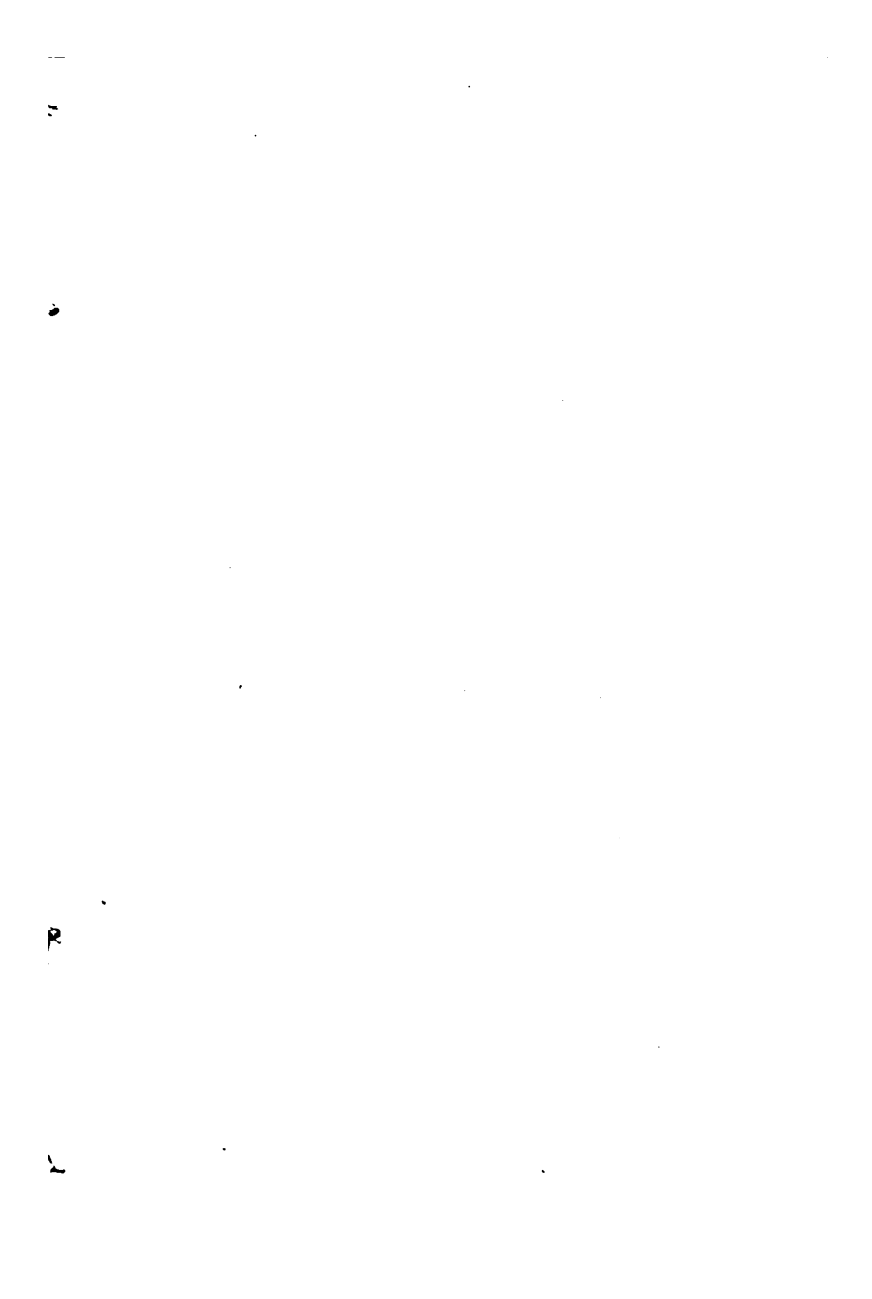


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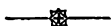


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The Broadoak Bells.



CHAPTER I.

A HOME IN LONDON.



AT the top of a high house, in a street leading out of another street, there lived a family named Wilson, and when my story begins, this family consisted of father, mother, and six children, who had lived in these rooms for two years. They had two rooms, neither of them very large, and no kitchen or pantry of any sort. Their food was all kept in a closet, and a press bedstead was let down at night for the three boys to sleep in, while the other three children slept in the room with their parents.

About seven o'clock one midsummer evening, there was a very savory smell in this keeping-room, and if you had looked in, you would have seen a cosy party sitting round the supper table, doing ample justice to their simple, but very good supper. On the table were some hot red herrings, a large loaf

of bread and a small piece of butter, a jug of beer for the big ones, and a jug of water for the little ones. The father who had been for some time very busy with his knife and fork, said, looking up at his wife, "Nan, who do you think I saw in London to-day?"

"Well," replied Nan, "with all those people for ever coming and going, and every one so much like all the rest, I should think you could never see any one you know; at any rate I can't tell who you saw."

"Some one from old Brodok."

"From Brodok! up in London! and you knew them among all the rest! who could it be?"

"Why you see country folk do look so different from Londoners, it would be strange if one did not know them, and as for Rogers with his round face and his gaiters and his hat, you certainly don't see many like him in a London street. I was turning round a corner, and who should I meet, face to face, but Bob Rogers. We had a long talk; he told me a lot of news; he had been to a Whitsuntide fair in the shires: He and all the youngsters are well and hearty; but the missis keeps ailing, and that's a bad job. They have all been high busy at Brodok doing up the church. They mended up the walls,

and put everything in order, and turned out all the big pews ; took away the organ gallery, put all the school-children to sit near the pulpit, and they have got benches all exactly alike, for everybody, rich and poor, just as it was at Littleham church. I can't think how the quality like it ; but I suppose gentlefolks sit so much on cushions and easy chairs home, they find it a sort of treat to sit on a hard bench."

" John, how you do talk ! Now I do like to see no difference between rich and poor in a church, where they all go to hear the same Bible, that says so particularly 'To the poor the Gospel is preached : ' and how can folks believe that, when the best part of the church is given up to the rich, and the poor, all sitting under the bells, or against the doors, and those old doors always have a great crack round them that the wind comes cutting through like anything. So they have restored the church,—well, what else ?"

" Old Jones is married again."

" Old Jones ! No ! Why, I would not have old Jones if there was not another man within twenty miles, to say nothing of his having had two wives already : who has he married ?"

A stranger to Brodok, and to my mind she

wont have much to complain of; he is a thriving man, and as for his having had two wives before this one, he is none the worse for that. He was very kind to them while they lived, and a man can't go fretting all his life because the Lord sends him a trouble or two. Then, as for his looks, he can't help a squint, and his straight eye looks as well after the main chance as any pair of eyes I know. Rogers says your Aunt Edmonds was mortal bad all the winter, but she seems to have come out with the trees and the flowers, as bright as any of them, and as cheery as a bird. Look at her now! Why, if she had sat down and fretted about all that came to her when she had so many troubles she would have been in her grave or in the workhouse. And then what would have become of all her grandchildren? Ah, you may be sure the Lord may afflict us, but He does like us to cheer up again."

"Well, John, tell us something more; how are they all up at the Park?"

"They are all quite well; but there is a sort of trouble there, too, for there is another girl born there, and they so wanting a boy."

"Now, I am sorry; I do feel for Mrs. Dulsit. You know, if there is no boy, all that beautiful

place will go to a gentleman who is soldiering in India, and who none of them know, and Mrs. Dulsit and the young ladies will have to go away, and live among strangers, and give up their lovely home. I know what it is to do that, I do feel for Mrs. Dulsit ;” and poor Mrs. Wilson’s eyes became full of tears, out of sympathy for Mrs. Dulsit.

“Well, now,” said the matter-of-fact John, “how *you* do talk. It is not worse than every parson’s wife has to do, though she may have sons more than enough ; and the squire is not dead yet ; Mrs. Dulsit may die before him, or they may both live till they are quite old, and the young ladies all married, and gone to homes of their own. What is the use of grieving about things that may never happen ? And as for sons, they are not always a blessing ; don’t you remember how Sir Ralph Hornby was always craving after a son for his title to go to, and the son came, and what does he do but bet, and swagger, and drink, till he has spent every penny of his father’s money and more besides, and he lives from hand to mouth now, as much as any gipsy in a cart.”

There was not much more news of Broadoak news ; but Mrs. Wilson’s mind was filled with memories of her old home, and she was very silent while she

was putting away the supper things, and getting the children to bed. At last her husband who had sat musing over the same subject, got up and put his hand kindly on her shoulder, saying, "Never mind old woman, let bygones be bygones ; *I* never rake up the past, so don't you do it. Everybody can bear what the Lord lays upon him, and I would rather have things as they are, than have you sickly and ailing like Mary Rogers. There, there, cheer up, old woman, and get you to bed, never mope over what is past and gone ; what is gone, *is* gone ; and what you can't alter, it is no use fretting after."





CHAPTER II.

A HOME IN THE COUNTRY.

“**NO**THER ! Mother ! here is father come home,” shouted a sturdy little boy, running into the back room of a cottage.

“Come home already ! and there is no supper or tea ready for him,” answered Mrs. Rogers, as she followed the boy into the front room, where Bob Rogers, the drover, was hugging his little girl, and talking rather loud.

“Well, my darling, glad to see dad back, are you ? Where is mother ? Well, Polly, how are you ? But what on earth have you got a pail of water standing in the middle of the room for ? unless it is to trip up the children ; one of them will get drowned in it, or tumble over it, if you don’t mind.”

“Why, Rogers, it’s for the tea. I fetched it just now, and let it stand there a bit, while I got up the fire ; but the wood is all wet and full of sap, and

there is no doubt about that ; but it must be a great trouble to her, too ; there is something to be said for her. Fancy what it must be to an ailing woman to have four healthy, noisy children always about !”

“My children are not so noisy as all that, sir ; *they* are not to blame.”

“No, of course not ; but you see it would be neither natural nor right for strong healthy children to keep quiet ; they *must* romp and play and make a noise, we all know that ; but still, they do try the patience of people shut up with them. When my wife was ill last week it was wet weather, and to keep her quiet I had my own four children all day in my study. Now, of course, I don't believe there are better children in all England than my own, but I declare to you I would rather walk to London and back, than have all four about me from breakfast till bedtime. You go back and help your wife instead of running away, and she will soon get things straight and ready.”

“Bless your life, sir ! why there's no fire, and only wet wood and broken bellows to get one up ; no chance of peace there, and no cheerfulness.”

“Well, then, my friend, do you spend the money your beer here would cost you in some dry wood, and take it home, it will soon burn up, and cheer

- the wife too. I have another reason. I want to come and talk over a plan with you, as I look upon you as a sort of leading man in the village. I would rather consult you about it before talking to others ; but you know I cannot come to talk to you at the 'Rising Sun,' yet I should like to see you about it this evening ; so I will look in at your house about seven o'clock, and I hope I may find you at home." Then, looking over his shoulder, Mr. Hart repeated, "a little dry kindling wood will soon blaze, you know, and boil the kettle."

Mr. Hart walked on, and Bob turned in at the "Rising Sun." Into the bar? No; he passed on to the kitchen. Some one called out from the bar, "There is Bob Rogers come back! come in, Bob, and have a pot."

"Bother you and your pots," answered Bob; "I've got to keep the pot boiling at home. Here, Mrs. Battley, have you such a thing as a dry faggot? My wife has got hold of some green stuff that is not fit to burn a Guy Fawkes, and I want to get the fire up."


Mrs. Battley was quite willing to sell Rogers some dry fire wood ; he was not only a good customer, but a man who brought custom to the village inn. She ordered out some kindling wood, laid by

for her own fires and not for sale, and Bob shouldered a faggot and strode away down the village street in a far happier frame of mind. When he reached home, he found his ailing wife still moaning over her broken bellows, but with life enough in the green sticks to show that fire was smouldering in the hissing wood, out of which the sap came in slow bubbles. Bob took his dry faggot into the back-house, and quickly snapped off an armful, which he threw on the smouldering bit of fire. It caught light in an instant, and up shone a cheery gleam, not only in the fireplace but in the poor wife's face ; a real genial smile played over her mouth, and a kindly grateful look came into her eyes, while she said, "Now if that is not good of you, Rogers ; I never thought what you had gone for." She got up and began to bestir herself with good will, soon hunted up the knives, and laid the cloth. There was some pork in pickle, Mrs. Rogers cut some slices, and the smell of the frying pork, the singing of the kettle, the crackle of the dry wood, and the laughter of the children, made pleasanter music for Bob Rogers than the talk of the tired men at the "Rising Sun" would have done. He was very glad he had met the parson !



CHAPTER III.

THE BELLS.

PPER was over, the baby asleep, and Bob's pipe lighted and nearly finished, when Mr. Hart came to pay his promised visit. He was very much pleased to see the happy family group, for, when he left Rogers so near the door of the inn, he did not feel at all sure what he was going to do. Nor indeed did Bob himself know at that time. Mr. Hart half feared when he rapped at the door of the cottage, that he should find sleepy children, a whining woman, and an empty chair, where the master of the house should be; and "master of the house" the husband is, if it is castle or cottage, and castle and cottage alike, should be always brighter and better when the master is at home. Kings and some very great people have a flag flying every day when they are at home, as a sign of joy and pleasure, but many a small house needs no flag to fly as a token, but is dull enough *without* its master, and cheerful and gay, with him in his own place.

Mr. Hart began his business at once. "My plan, Rogers," said he, "is this. I want to see if we cannot manage to get up a ringing club at Broadoak. Now the church is in order, and the tower rebuilt and therefore strong enough to bear the weight and vibration of a peal, and the bells being hung there already, it seems a great pity we should not ring them. It is not a difficult thing to do, at all; we should want six strong, steady, men to pull them, and we must have patience, and perseverance. I believe it is sixty years since there has been a peal rung in this parish, never since the first crack came in the old tower, so we must start quite a-fresh. Now, if you will fall in to my plan, and become the leader, we will talk over who the other five shall be, and I will ask them to join. I am no friend, as you very well know, to drawing men away from their own homes when work is over; but we must have one good practice every week, and I will gladly give a plain supper to the ringers after it,—just bread and cheese, and home brewed beer in my kitchen. We can make a good many changes with six bells, and if you will help me, and we can get up a peal, we will ask some ringing clubs to pay us a visit, and show us what we can do with our bells. Perhaps by next harvest, we

may be able to manage a simple peal, and that will help us to be grateful and joyful, but by the time your little Polly, there, comes to be married, we may be able to ring as fine a set of wedding bells as any parish in England."

Rogers was surprised at this plan, and there were several things about it that pleased him. He liked being consulted first, and he liked a little social meeting with other men as well as any one. He liked to fall in with any plan of the good parson, who never suggested anything that was not for the good and happiness of other people. But there were difficulties about this ringing club, and Rogers reflected how little he understood about bells. How old Smith who always made a dismal "ding, dong" on a Sunday, would dislike any interference with them, and how if things went wrong, there would be five other men to pull through with. Mr. Hart knew very well that the more men pull together, the better they pull through anything, and that the best plan was to start an idea, and leave people to think it out for themselves without saying too much at first. He very soon rose to take leave of Rogers and his wife, when the latter said, "My husband saw Wilson in London, sir, —John Wilson."

"Did you, really," said Mr. Hart, "how was he ? and how was he getting on ; poor fellow ?"

"He seemed very well, sir, and to be getting on fairly as you may say. He is a carrier's man, and getting good wages. His uncle is the carrier, and he is a man with no family, and well off, and Wilson hopes he will make him a partner bye and bye ; he told me living in London was very dear and rent terribly high. He rents two rooms at the top of a house, and his six youngest children are still on his hands, only the two eldest do anything for themselves, and they are both in service, and doing well. John always did make the best of things you know, sir ; but it was easy to see it hurt him to think of living, all that lot of them in two rooms, and he was wonderful glad to hear about the old place."

"Poor fellow ! and his wife, did you hear anything about her ?"

"She lives with him, sir, working hard, and hardly ever stirs out, he said ; but of course he did not want to talk much about her."

"Ah, Rogers ! there are worse troubles than ill health to bear. We are apt to say health is the chief blessing, and so it is ; but no man is ever shamed and cast down by illness at home as by

sin, and no child need ever blush for an ailing mother. Wilson has been a good husband, and I do hope and trust he may do well."

"You are right, Sir," said Mrs. Rogers, "barring *my* man, there is not such another as John Wilson anywhere; but I don't think Rogers would have borne and forgiven as *he* has."

"Not I," said Bob, "I should have more likely done something bad myself, if you had played me such tricks, but we won't talk about that. I suppose every snail carries the shell that fits him, and no one can take it off his back. I must say I was very glad to see Wilson looking so cheerful and well."

"Good night to you; good night Mrs. Rogers," said Mr. Hart. "If you will let me know in a few days, who you settle with as the other ringers, and on which night it will be best to have the practising, I will make things smooth with Smith."

Rogers took up the ringing club very heartily, and before the week was over he went to Mr. Hart with the names of five men who were willing, and strong, and steady. Of course a great many people in the village wondered why they wanted to disturb the bells at all, and some said "It never was so," as people often do when old customs are brought

in again, or new customs introduced ; but after a little wondering and talking, the thing was looked upon more favourably, and even Smith confessed he saw no reason why, as the bells were there, and always had been there, they should not be used ; it was clear enough they must have been rung once on a time, and they must have been hung to be rung. And so the ringing began.

After the first practising, at the first ringers' supper, Mr. Hart came into his kitchen, and, taking a seat at the top of the table, he said : " I think, as our bells have a history attached to them, it is as well that everyone in the parish should know it. I have, therefore, written a short account of them, as far as anything can be known of them ; I have had it printed, and intend giving a copy to every house. It is now six hundred years since our beautiful old church was first built, and two of the bells are evidently as old as the church itself. One was the curfew bell ; the other that which we call the ' dead bell,' but which was formerly known as the ' passing bell.' It was always tolled in olden times at the time of death, while the spirit was passing away. It bears this singular inscription :

' I TOLL FOR THE PASSING SOUL.'

The sound of this bell is familiar to all of us ; few

are living in the village who have not mourned in their hearts and gone heavily to the grave of some one dear to them, while the solemn toll went on. The curfew bell was tolled at eight o'clock every night from 1066, or soon after that date, and at its sound every candle and fire was extinguished. This was, of course, a precaution necessary in lawless times, when any light would have betrayed the dwellings of men to robbers. And the curfew was not only a warning to extinguish the lights, it was also sounded at times of alarm ; it was a watch-bell, and at its sound at unusual times all peasants roused themselves and assembled to meet any threatened danger. This bell also bears a curious inscription :

‘AS WATCHMEN TRUE YE SHOULD APPEAR,
WHEN THE JUDGE IS DRAWING NEAR.’

The next in age is one bearing date 1630. Now the parish register tells us that in 1630, one Mr. Dulcit, newly come into possession of the hall, which had formerly been a convent, married one Dorothy Palmer. I think it very likely that this bell was given on that occasion, as it was the custom of our forefathers to make pious offerings to churches at special times in their lives. This is the more likely as twelve years later this Mr. Dulcit evidently gave a bell in memory of his only child,

who was drowned in 1642. It bears these touching words :—

‘GOD’S WILL BE DONE, THO’ HE SLEW MY SON.’

You all know the gravestone raised to the memory of ‘That sweet boy, Charles Dulcit.’ The last two bells were very likely put up to make the peal complete ; they have no inscription, except the names of the Churchwardens, and the maker, and the date, 1670. Thus, you see, our bells have a tale to tell : of death, of watchfulness, and of resignation ; and I hope we shall never hear their united harmony without bearing in mind these important things. And now, my friends, it only remains for me to thank you for the good spirit in which you have met me in this matter, and we will drink success and unity to the ‘Brodok Ringing Club ;’” and Mr. Hart drank off a glass of beer with right good will, while the men, in a gruff low murmur, repeated his words, and drank also to their new club.





CHAPTER IV.

IN LONDON AGAIN.

WHILE we have been boiling the kettle, and ringing the bells at the pretty village of Broadoak, our first friend Mrs. Wilson has been toiling on in her two rooms, in her hard dark London life, trying to make up to her patient, right-hearted husband for a trial long passed, that nothing will ever blot out from his memory, or from hers.

The day after Wilson had met his old neighbour Rogers, in London, was a sad one for Nancy. John was out with his carrier's cart all day. The five elder children at their several schools, the baby asleep, or cooing and playing by itself in its cradle, or on the floor; and Nan,—who had washed the day before, and dried the linen London fashion, across the window, across the ceiling, anywhere, where she could fix the line,—went stedfastly on, folding and ironing till about four o'clock, when she began peeling the potatoes for the evening supper. While she was so occupied, a knock came at the

door, and a district visitor came in. Now there is as much difference in district visitors, as in all other people. Some of them mean well, but are sharp and hard, and no wonder ; for they are constantly finding themselves imposed upon, others are fussy, and fidget about little things, worrying where they mean to help. Some are *too* kind, and weak, and these, giving no confidence and gaining none, are neither looked up to or trusted. Some (and Mrs. Beck was among the number) are motherly women, and go into the poor houses as a mother into her nursery. All honour to them ; the heart opens, and the face brightens to them, while (best test of all) the little children stand near them confidingly, and touch with a caressing movement, the drapery of their dresses. Everybody "warmed up" to Mrs. Beck, and I suppose she heard more of the trials and troubles of daily life in one day than many people hear in their whole lives. She did not seem to feel so much *for* people as *with* them. It would never do if all helpers of the poor were like Mrs. Beck ; but it is a blessing beyond what tongue can tell, or pen can write, that there are some such, as many a heavy heart and broken spirit can testify.

Mrs. Wilson dusted a chair and welcomed her

guest with a faint, melancholy smile, and Mrs. Beck asked the usual questions about the children, "I see you are preparing supper," she said, "I do like to see a good supper got ready, for when the work is over, and there is time to sit down altogether, an early supper is a comfortable meal. What is your supper to be?"

"We are very fond of potatoes," answered Nan, "and when they are well boiled and dried, I slice some onions among them, and a little pepper and salt, and sometimes a bit of dripping, it makes a very good supper, but I do miss my pickle-tub. In the country I could cut up some pork fat, and scatter among the hot potatoes, but up here pork is as dear as butchers' meat. I never see salt pork here."

"Don't you get some sent up to you?" asked Mrs. Beck, "it would come up by train for very little money, and your friends would easily manage it for you."

Poor Mrs. Wilson's eyes filled with tears. "I have no friends left where I came from," she said, "I turned them all away; we had never been here but for that. There is a great deal lies at my door."

"But friends turn round again," answered Mrs.

Beck, "you may bring them back perhaps in time."

"Oh, no, Ma'am, never; no; all I can do is to begin again, as I have tried to do, and *do* try to do. But sometimes the old scenes will come up again, and yesterday my husband met an old neighbour in the streets, who talked to him about the place we came from, and all day to-day I have had it so fresh before my mind, and oh! it cuts me to the heart; and that *I* should have caused all the trouble." Mrs. Beck could say but little to comfort a sorrow of which she knew nothing, and Nan went on, looking painfully up at the sky, "Only to think of the quiet ways down there. They are fetching the cows up, about this time. I think I can hear the call, as the man stands at the meadow gate, and the cows come slowly up to the milking shed. The children are running down the village, just let out of school, and the shadows are beginning to lie on one side of the road, and the evening coolness is coming on after the hot day."

Poor Mrs. Wilson! kindly tears overflowed her burning eyes, and she fairly sobbed like a child. Mrs. Beck waited for the first burst to spend itself. She knew that if retrospection is bitter, with nothing more than our everyday sins and shortcomings on

our minds and consciences, it must be anguish, indeed, with some sin, be it what it might, that had alienated friends and driven a whole family to leave their peaceful home ; but her duty was to console, not to enquire. As Nan paused and calmed herself, Mrs. Beck said, " Do you come to church ? have you ever gone to the Wednesday afternoon service ? there is much strength given us by these times of prayer and meditation."

" I have never been inside a church since my trouble," replied Mrs. Wilson, " I feel as if I could not look my God in the face. My husband and children go, and I hope they pray for me. I need their prayers, but it is not for me to go and put myself among those who are not like me."

" The afternoon Wednesday service is intended for those who, like you, have family cares to keep them much at home ; it is at three o'clock when children are at school, and most mothers have a little leisure. There is only the Litany and a very short, plain sermon, more like an address : you are a stranger to every one who goes to it, and you would find great comfort and peace in attending church again. It is not for me to speak peace where there is no peace, but you know the parable and who spoke it, that ends with these words, ' I

tell you this man went down justified rather than the other.' Now, Mrs. Wilson, good-bye, I hope I have not spoiled the supper."

The unhappy woman felt more cheered and lifted up after this visit than she had done for two years, and when her husband and children gathered round the supper table, and she served out the hot savory meal, she smiled pleasantly at good, honest John and the youngsters, feeling that peace and comfort might yet be in store for her.





CHAPTER V.

THE PARISH.

Y readers may perhaps be sufficiently interested in "Brodok," as Broadoak was generally called, to wish for some little history of the village and its inhabitants. Happily, there are many villages in England as pretty, as happy, and as interesting. It was said that very many years ago the Monastery of Brownwich, being too full, or having a quarrel among its members, swarmed, as bees do in similar circumstances, and a party of monks went forth to seek a place where they could raise another convent and live in peace. In the heat of noonday, they came upon a large spreading oak tree, at the margin of a forest; here they rested, and liked their quarters so well, that here they determined to build their house, and under the big tree they lived till able to move into their convent. Hence the name of the settlement. Time and civilised life reduced the wood to a few trees, one of which stood—a grand majestic oak—where four roads met; a few seats were placed

round this tree, and the grass below was fine and smooth as a lawn. One road led to the village, a second to the church ; a third up a hill, to a mill and a common, and so on to the market town ; and the fourth was the carriage drive to the park. This park and hall had been formerly the actual monastery and grounds of the monks, and like many other such places, it never passed direct from father to son. Mr. Dulcit, the present owner, inherited from a grandfather, and at his death the property would go to a cousin ; but this fact did not trouble the good, warm-hearted squire, who was too thankful for the blessings he possessed to repine after any that were withheld ; and he lived a useful, active life among his happy family and among his neighbours, rich and poor, as "Truest friend and noblest foe." Very near the Broadoak tree stood the rectory, a large old-fashioned roomy house, with tall chimneys, windows of all sizes, abundance of ivy, and a garden more full of flowers and fruit than any other garden of its size in the county. I need hardly say it was a nest full of birds ; children of all ages lived there ; for not only had Mr. Hart a supply of his own, he had always some children belonging to somebody else staying there, and no sound was sweeter to the parent birds

than the twitter of these little ones. Passing from the rectory to the village, one passed the road-side inn, of which we spoke in our opening chapter,—a regular country inn, small and clean, and well-conducted. The landlord and his wife were kind people to any sick villagers, and no noise or disorder was known in front of the house, as is too frequently the case with roadside inns; still, many a shilling was spent at the “Rising Sun” that was ill spared, and many a wife had been heard to say, “I wish there was no ‘Rising Sun’ in the place.”

Then came the shop, the blacksmith’s forge, and the carpenter’s shed, the school, a tidy house, in which lived “Old Smith,” the clerk, sexton, and baker, a very important man, with a large chest and a loud voice, which had great power in keeping order among the village boys. Smith was a thriving man, and well known to be saving money; he always looked well and warmly dressed; he had a smoking chimney, cured a great many hams and a great deal of bacon, and indeed made money in a variety of ways. The cottages, about forty in number, were scattered about, not two alike; all were now tidy, and in good order; not one but had its own oven, its own garden, and little gate, and every convenience attached; so that the people

had but themselves to thank if they were not happy and comfortable. It takes time, however, before those who have been living in poor wretched cottages begin to feel a pride in their better houses, and it is a pleasant sign when they can afford the little expense of window curtains, and give the time to make the gardens look pretty, and have flowers in the windows. Some of the Brodok people kept their cottages as clean and as pretty as possible; some alas! kept on their old untidy ways and slovenly looks, and, as is the case everywhere, the wages that kept one family in comfort, and their house a pattern of neatness, would be to another family only enough to keep body and soul together, with house uncared for, children without boots, wife in disorder, and husband in rags.

And now for the church. It stood quite apart in a meadow, and the lane leading to it with trees on each side was half a mile long. It was a very old church, and had some most beautiful windows in it, and a door that people came far to see, such beautiful carved stone was there round it; also a very fine old font inside the south door, and a curious niche in the wall, with an old painting of the Holy Child on the lap of His Mother, and the wise men bending before Him with their offerings

of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. A few years before the times I am writing about, doorway, and font, and picture, and all the walls and arches of the grand old church had been covered with plaster and whitewash ; a great square pew with green curtains had been set apart for the squire ; a smaller square pew for the chief farmer ; and three more square pews for the three next farmers ; while the poor people were left to sit upon rickety benches behind these dusty pews ; and the school-children had other rickety forms under the gallery, which crossed the arch at the western end, (hiding it and the tower), where they went to sleep in the summer, and coughed in the winter, being continually brought to order by a sounding blow from the school-mistress's cane, always followed by suppressed sobs from the culprit, and suppressed giggling from his companions. In the gallery above was the strength and marvel of the whole service. Five men, who were called "the band," had five instruments upon which they played most extraordinary tunes, Old Smith's father sometimes performing an anthem all by himself on the big trombone, and during the musical performance the congregation all turned round and faced this gallery. It seems difficult to believe this now, with our more

reverent and orderly manners in conducting the Church services, but thirty years ago it was common enough. Many who read this book will call to mind churches that answer to the description just given. Happily, all these slipshod ways are mended now at Brodok, as they are gradually mending everywhere. Broadoak Church no longer feels like a damp cellar, no longer smells of dust and mushrooms, or looks like a dismal place into which people carelessly enter once a week, without feeling as if THERE is the centre of all the interest and reality of the Christian's life. All the week round this church stands open; at times a weary toiling person enters, and, able to sit or kneel quietly down for a few minutes, can go away strengthened by the short interval of rest and meditation in the sacred peace of the Temple of the Lord. Who can tell the blessing of such moments to people whose lives are one continued struggle, in houses where there is no private room to which one can retire and pray in secret, no power of ever feeling alone with one's own heart and God. Every Friday morning and every holy-day services were held, and the congregation on Sunday was as orderly and as hearty as any in England.

Of Mr. Hart, the clergyman, we shall speak in.

future pages. It is impossible to describe such a man as Mr. Hart; his life told of his religious convictions; his face told that he was the messenger of "glad tidings of great joy;" and his influence over all with whom he came in contact, showed the earnestness and simplicity with which he believed all that he taught.





CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST PEAL.

MR. HART always had a great desire for a general "harvest home" and thanksgiving every year, when the farmers should all club together, and the men sup together as a parish festival, with a thanksgiving service at the church before supper; but he could not carry out his plan. Mr. Pendally, the great farmer, had a pride in his own harvest home, when the men he employed, and their wives, had supper in his own brew-house; his wife and daughters waiting on them, and when the men had plenty to eat, and more than enough to drink. Mr. Pendally could not agree to join with the smaller farmers who employed fewer men, and sent them to sup at the "Rising Sun." Mr. Dulcit did not farm at all, and he would not interfere. He thought the pride of Mr. Pendally in his own hospitality was very natural, and he argued you could not make people happy after one pattern, and wished to let things remain as they were. Mrs.

Dulcit who loved old customs would gladly have had a harvest home like those we see in old pictures, with blue ribbons tied on to the waggons, and great boughs decorating them, and festoons of flowers at the sides, but she was a wise woman, and knew it was of no use to urge people when they were unwilling, so she and Mr. Hart yielded their wishes, and waited patiently.

But now that the bells were ready to ring out a joyous peal, and the men had practised them long enough to feel no doubt about making a steady, merry ringing, Mr. Hart could not resist trying once more to bring in his favourite project of a universal rejoicing. The end of it was that the old plan of the farmers and their private harvest homes, should be left where it was, but a general party should take place in addition. Namely, on the Sunday that should follow the last corn gleaning, a thanksgiving sermon should be preached in the afternoon: and after service, every man, woman, and child in the village should have a good substantial tea in the park; tables were to be spread under the trees, and after the tea they might walk all over the gardens and grounds, upon condition that they did so quietly and decorously, doing no injury to lawn or flowers. Mr. Hart was

quite sure the confidence of Mr. Dulcit would be justified, and that he would not have cause to repent his kind offer.

The day came—bright and cheerful as Mr. Hart's own heart. A large congregation attended the village church, rejoicing as people cannot help rejoicing when merry bells ring on a beautiful day. And when, before the sermon, the "Harvest Hymn" was sung, it came with such a burst of voices as made the throat choke and the eyes overflow :

"Come ! ye thankful people, come ;
Raise the song of Harvest Home."

Then, after the service, as the bells rang out again their loud happy six notes, it sounded in the ears of many listeners, as if repeating these grateful words : "Come !! thankful people come," and Rogers and his five mates, were the last who gathered round the tables.

Old people, as well as old customs, were dear to Mrs. Dulcit, and she had a special table served by herself for them ; the whitest bread, the prettiest pats of butter, and the best cups and saucers were at this little corner, and some beautiful slices of cold ham, looking so pink and pretty on the white plates, were handed round. Mrs. Dulcit, smiling, and speaking so distinctly (but never loudly) could be

heard and understood by the most aged and the deafest person alive. She not only spoke, she loved to listen ; she knew that what men and women of eighty had heard *their fathers* say, brought one to the times that we call historical, and that these spoken traditions were more than any printed book, which is, after all, only the same things written down, and that in this way the customs and the events of 120 years ago, are brought face to face with us who are now living.

And thus grew the harvest tea, which every year since that bright pleasant day, has come round again with the ripening grain, and the gleaner's bundle, on a warm September Sunday. Never has Mr. Dulcit seen cause to regret the free opening of his grounds ; on the contrary, many a cottage garden looks brighter, and many a path better kept, since the villagers have seen how well they keep them "up at the park." Should any of the villagers be ill, their portion of tea and cake, and white bread and fresh butter, is taken to them by some kind neighbour, and the sick or infirm peep out of their windows in the twilight, when the happy families troop home, talking gaily, or perhaps singing from the hymn, "All is safely garnered in," and then creep back whispering to them-

selves, "If one member rejoice, all the others rejoice with it."

And so years passed on, for our story will not wait that we should linger over every year. The children grew up, and the parents grew grey. Sickness and sorrow came, and took up the watches of the night. Joy and rejoicing came round with the day. Silly little cares, jealousies, envyings, backbitings,—all came, and went, and passed away; and so did the great trials, which are the "rod and the staff," to strengthen us,—in a word, LIFE went on, but ever with good friends and true at the rectory and "up at the park;" and so for ten years, if you please, we will leave sweet Broadoak to sleep in peace, and turn over a page that shall find how we have grown up in that pleasant nook. Happy village! too happy even to know how happy it is, like children on a summer morn,—
"Too blest to care."





CHAPTER VII.

A NEW IDEA.

AND so time went on. You would not see much change in the village of Broadoak; certainly the trees were a little more spreading, and the plantations a little thicker, and the children of ten years ago were becoming young men and women. A stranger would not see much change; but Mr. Hart, who knew and watched his people tenderly, was just now looking with some anxiety, at changes creeping on in the characters of those he had watched when they were tender buds, and who were now bursting into the full blossom of life,—butterflies coming out of the chrysalis of childhood,—birds fluttering their wings with the feathers only half grown. Ah! would the parent birds teach the young ones how to fly, or must the poor fledglings come home bruised and battered to the nest they had left with so much courage and confidence? In plain words, Mr. Hart was watching some of his people with great anxiety. Now was the turning point in the lives of some who had been

will in time marry men in *their* class of life, who will *not* require them to work; and they will be fortunate men who win them, for the Miss Dulcits are good girls, though they are not perhaps fitted for poor men. Where are you staying, Bruce?"

"I am staying at Gortown; to tell the truth, I am only there that I might come over to Broadoak. I brought my horse that I might be able to get about the country easily."

"Your own horse is it? A very handsome fellow he is, and very well groomed, and turned out as he should be;" and Mr. Hart patted the animal's neck, as the horse turned his handsome head round, looking quite conscious that he was being admired.

After a short pause, Mr. Hart said abruptly, "Who keeps him?"

"What do you mean? Do you mean where do I keep him?"

"No, no; who pays for him?"

"Why, man alive! I keep him. I tell you it is my own horse. Who do you suppose should keep him but myself?"

"And how long have you had a horse? you had none when you were my pupil."

"No; but I am not a boy now. You must remember I have been in India almost as long as you

have been here, and I have kept my horse for the last ten or twelve years."

"But you did not keep a horse till you could afford to do so. You counted the cost, and knew when it would be prudent."

"Of *course* I did. I tell you, my dear Hart, I am no longer the idle boy you tried to teach mathematics to ; I have been a man some years now."

"My dear Bruce, all I mean to imply is this : You did not keep a horse till you could afford to do so ; you did not buy a well-bred animal like that, intending to keep him like a rough horse. Well, don't take a wife till you can do it with equal prudence,—till you can *keep* your wife."

Captain Bruce rubbed his horse gently between the ears with his riding whip, as he asked quietly, "Are *you* married?"

"Yes, thank God," answered the rector ; "but I had waited for years before I saw that I could take the woman I loved to my own home. I was engaged to my wife all the time you knew me at Boston, and I only married her when I came here."

"Well, you see you waited for means ; how did means come ? Oh, you parsons are lucky fellows ; you get a living and a house, and it is all right ; dear me, I wish somebody would give me a living

and a house ! By-the-bye, how did you get this living ? When I knew you at Beston you were only curate, with no particular prospects. How did you get a living ? ”

“ The bishop gave it to me,” answered Mr. Hart. “ The bishop was a personal friend of Lord Caynham, my squire at Beston, and during a visit he paid there I often met him and talked with him. He was very anxious about all the livings in his gift, that they should fall to the lot of the working bees, and not to drones or wasps, and when he was leaving Beston he told me he sorely needed men in his diocese whose hearts were in their work, and the first vacant living in his gift he should offer to me. He did so, and most thankfully I accepted it.”

“ Well, then, you see, you got preferment without any trouble on your part ; it was simply a piece of luck.”

“ That is what many people said. Some even blamed the bishop for favouritism, and looked upon it as caprice.”

“ But,” pursued Captain Bruce, “ after all, you had asked your wife to marry you when you had no prospects. How did you mean to get on ? ”

Mr. Hart looked up earnestly at his old pupil, he answered him, “ I don’t know what you

may think about it," he said, "but I will tell you the plain simple truth. My wife's father died while I was the curate of Beston. I had no prospects, and very little money besides the £100 a year of my curacy. Could I let her leave me while I knew how I loved her, without asking her if she would wait till I had a home to offer her? I could not; so before the family left Beston I asked her if she would be my wife as soon as I saw my way clearly to claiming that great blessing, and marrying with prudence. She consented, and I waited and prayed."

"You *what!*"

"I prayed that my way might be made plain before me, and that I might, in God's good time, be able to take the woman I loved for my wife; and then I waited, watching for every opportunity that presented itself. I met with you, you know, and Howard, as pupils, and I thought most likely my means would come through that medium. So when the bishop's offer of this living came to me, I looked upon it as a wonderful answer to my prayer. Most happily I came, and most happily I have lived here. My own little private money, and my wife's little money, added to the stipend, gives us an income sufficient for our needs and our

family. Perhaps you expect me to quote Scripture as I am a parson, but I will only quote you a living poet, by no means called a pious poet, who says :

‘ More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of,
For so the whole round earth is every way
Girt by gold chains about the feet of God.’

Good-bye !”

Captain Bruce rode thoughtfully up the lane ; a new idea had been presented to his mind. He, like many other men, prayed in a vague way every day, “Give us this day our daily bread ;” but to apply to God as to a Father, for personal wants, for actual needs, had never entered his head, and with his eyes turned downwards, and carelessly lashing his boots with his whip, he kept repeating to himself, “What a rum idea ! he waited and he prayed !”





CHAPTER VIII.

ROGERS IN A RAGE.

THE evening of this very day,—a soft, mild evening early in May,—was one to tempt anybody to come out of doors. Some would come out only to look at the evening star, which was shining like a small sun in the calm cloudless sky. Here and there a woman came to fetch in some linen, left on the hedges till the last thing, to bleach as well as dry; some came to look up the road for a husband or father coming home rather late. It was not evident what made little Polly Rogers come out; first she was in her own garden; then she sauntered round into the road, and stood at a style, leaning on her arms, and looking very bright and pretty, as the glow from the setting sun shone upon her bright rosy smiling face. She was not long alone: very soon a gentleman with fishing rod and basket came quickly over the meadow path, and stood chatting with Polly, quite as an acquaintance. He crossed the style, and sat carelessly swinging his legs and feet, while she pulled bits of the hawthorn blossom to pieces, and smiled and chatted in reply.

Polly was not quite seventeen, a comely, active little village maiden, obedient and docile enough to her father, but able to do just what she liked with her mother. In these ten years Mrs. Rogers had grown no better, but she had grown no worse, and was still feeble, ailing, and complaining. She let Polly have things all her own way, glad enough to be left to herself, while her daughter's neat, clean, and orderly activity made home far more comfortable than it used to be to "father and the boys." As for Rogers himself, Polly was the apple of his eye, the inmost core of his heart, and the whole sunshine of his life. To the gentleman going home from fishing, she was a toy that amused him while he was idling at home with nothing to do and finding time hang heavy; he would not have troubled himself to go after her if she had been shy, but having once found her willing to talk with him, he came round by her house a second and a third time; and this was what had come to the knowledge of the rector, causing him to knit his brow and knock off the thistle heads in his walk up the lane. Mr. Hart knew very well what idle gentlemen will do sometimes for mere amusement, and he knew what silly girls will do from flattered vanity, and he was sad at the vision of bright-eyed little

Polly, the first child he had baptized when he came to Broadoak, in trouble and disgrace.

Polly, looking down at her hawthorn blossoms, and listening to the gentleman's soft way of speaking and laughing, did not see her father, who, striding down the road, was at the stile before she had any idea he was coming.

Rogers was a downright man; he too knew something of the evils of idleness and vanity. He stopped short; Polly started and gave a little cry; the gentleman picked up his basket, and, saying "Good night," pursued his way home.

"Holloa!" cried Bob, "what's up?" But no answer came from the gentleman, who walked leisurely on, leaving poor little Polly to her fate.

Rogers turned to his daughter. Polly's tears lay very near to her bright eyes, and very easily came running down her rosy cheeks. Frightened and sobbing, she began, "Oh, father, there is nothing up; it is only young Mr. Guest going home from his fishing, and ——"

"And coming to make a fool of you on the way. How often has he come here after *you*, tell me *that*?" shouted Rogers, clenching Polly's arm as he spoke.

"Oh! father, only last week and the week before; he is only on his way home."

"But this is *not* his way home from the river; it is a good mile out of the way. However, he is not the first man who has gone a milè out of his way for a pair of bright eyes, though there may not be a grain of sense in the head that holds them, and he won't be the last. Moreover, you are not the first woman fool enough to go dawdling after a man who means you no good; but I'll tell you what, my wench, I won't have that sort of game going on. I am no John Wilson, to bear and forgive. I never took a stick to child of mine yet; but if I find you philandering after fine gentlemen, I will give you such a horsewhipping as shall bring you to your senses, or my name is not Bob Rogers! Now turn in."

Bob followed his daughter indoors, locked the door, and took out the key, as if he feared she might be bodily stolen away, and then his rage began to calm down. Moodily he ate his supper. The boys had had theirs and gone out; Polly's appetite had been fairly frightened away; so Rogers devoured all the hot peas pudding, and drank the broth without an interruption or remark, for his wife, watching him and seeing there was something very wrong, did not venture to ask what was the matter. Supper over, Bob lighted his pipe, and

turning round to the fire said, "Mother, you must get that wench out to service."

"What, Polly? Now, Rogers, what should I do without her? and what would you and the boys do?"

"Never mind us at home," answered her husband, "we shall have to do without her one way or another, for if we don't get her out respectably she will turn herself out. I will never have my girl at home in disgrace, and ashamed to lift up her head. She has got too much liberty at home, and she will be making acquaintances that are not fit for her. You go both of you up to the park to-morrow, and speak to Mrs. Dulcit; and go round to the rectory, and see Mrs. Hart, and say we want to get Polly to service, and will be much obliged if they can help her to a place; and then you keep a sharp eye on the wench; don't let her get out of doors when the owls are about; girls should be up with the lark and not out with the owls. There, that will do; no more crying and fussing. I have made up my mind. You try and get a good place, and turn into a good servant, and some day you'll have a sweetheart that won't turn away like a beaten dog from your own father, and I am not the man to be hard on those that mean well."

Poor Polly! she had no reply to make. She

knew her father to be a passionate man, but never had he been angry with *her* before. She knew he was right, but still she was very wretched. She sobbed herself to sleep that night, and when the morning came was half afraid to give him his usual kiss. But Bob's anger was gone in the morning, only as he went out he looked over his shoulder, saying, "Now mind !"

Neither Mrs. Dulcit nor Mrs. Hart asked questions why Polly was to go ; they both thought it quite right, and would send, if they heard of anything, and Polly must *wait*. So I hope that she too would pray.





CHAPTER IX.

NEWS FOR BROADOAK.

A FORTNIGHT passed without any news for Polly Rogers, and then a message came that she was to go up to the park to-morrow morning. With a beating, anxious heart she went; with a light, happy heart she came home. Her father was getting an early dinner before starting off for one of his long walks,—fetching beasts from a distance for the Gortown market,—so when Polly burst into the room, full of importance and joy, he was there to hear her news.

“Father! mother! I have got a place! and *such* a place. It is with Lady Lee,—Mrs. Dulcit’s sister,—and I am to be schoolroom maid, to wait on the three young ladies and the governess, do their bedrooms and their schoolroom, and all the needlework for them, and take in their tea and breakfast, and dress the young ladies. I have nothing to do with the rest of the house. I told Lady Lee I did not understand the ways of a lady’s house, nor how to dress young ladies, but I had no fear about house-

work or needlework ; and she spoke so kindly,—she said if I would attend to what I was told, her maid would show me all the ways I did not understand, and I am to be ready to go on the first of June. And what do you think ? As I came out, Mrs. Dulcit's Mary told me such a piece of news ! The eldest Miss Dulcit is going to be married to a gentleman who is stopping at the park, and they are going to India in the autumn. And oh ! father ! I must have some new clothes for service ; how am I to get them ?”

Polly was quite breathless with all her news ; but here she stopped, for she suddenly thought what a lot of money it would take to buy all the gowns and aprons that she should want as “schoolroom maid.” Bob said nothing, but slowly went up the stairs, and unlocked the “hutch” that stood by his bedside, and came down again with a coloured pocket handkerchief in his hand ; slowly untying the corner he put three gold sovereigns on the table.

“Oh, father ! why there's the blue and pink handkerchief that I hemmed for you,—the first thing that ever I hemmed. I always thought it was lost, as I never see it among the things in the wash ; but I never liked to ask you about it.”

"No, my wench, that was never lost. I have been trying to save up a bit against a rainy day, I could not lay by much; and so it *will* be a rainy day to me when my little Polly goes away! Take them, girl, and get what you want, and I will begin saving again: and Polly, put your whole mind into your work; don't you go hankering after holidays, and wishing to get work over,—work never is over. And mind you this, I would rather hear that great bell tolling over you in the churchyard than have you bring shame and trouble on your mother and me. You will find plenty of people to tempt you everywhere, but those that tempt you insult you, and don't you lend your company to those who don't mean well by you."

Poor Rogers! he was very grave and quiet, but he bore his loss like a man, and no one but the God of Heaven knew what a dark cloud came over his house when his child went out of it. Mrs. Rogers took it very much to heart, too; and, moreover, she could not see the necessity of it at all.

"Just as the girl is got out of being a child, and become a help to me, you must needs send her away; but everything goes wrong with me!"

And young Mr. Guest, was he at all sorry that Polly no longer came to meet him at the style?

flowers on the path. The sun shone, and the bells rang, but still Mr. Dulcit looked grave ; and as his daughter, in her white dress and veil, with her modest downcast look, walked up the church on his arm, Rogers looked after them thinking,—
“Perhaps my loss is the lightest after all. I can have my girl back any day, and not feel there is half the world between us ; but no man likes to lose his daughter be it how it may.”





CHAPTER X.

A BAD SAD STORY.

WE must return to our first friends—the Wilsons. The ten years that had passed so quietly over Broadoak, had changed the outer life of John Wilson's family. They no longer tenanted their two rooms at the top of a London house, for worldly affairs had prospered with the Wilson's as with many another family where the hearts are not light. Wilson's uncle, the carrier, had begun to lose his eyesight, when he offered John the post of driver to his cart. At first Wilson was only the paid driver, but as his uncle's increasing blindness compelled him to put more and more trust in John, he took him in as a partner, and found a small but convenient house near himself for Wilson's family. This was in what is called a "suburb" of London, where the air is a trifle purer and cleaner than in London itself, though the roar of sounds is still heard there; and black dirt, such as country people know nothing of, covers everything.

Every morning John Wilson started off—one day for the city, another alternate day for the West-end of London—and being diligent, honest and sober, he increased his business; and at the time Polly Rogers went to service, and Miss Dulcit married, Wilson was a thriving man. The chief comfort to him had been the providing a trade for each of his younger sons. Of his eight children, the eldest was married; and the youngest, the baby of ten years of age, had died before any of the troubles of life had begun for it; the eldest boy had been taken in as under gardener, and thus had earned wages and learned a business without the expense of an apprenticeship. One of John's rooted beliefs was this—If you know how to do a thing well, that thing will be found for you to do. And so he had been most thankful to put each of his four boys in turn to a real trade, at which they were each of them earning money. When after ten years we again visit the unhappy Nancy—their mother—her family now provided for, and no more care to be felt for the means whereby food and raiment were to be found, it seemed as if poor Nan's work in life was over. Her strength failed her day by day, and the internal complaint from which she had long suffered, bore her daily nearer to her grave. Let us

visit her clean little bedroom early in July—a hot dry afternoon—her bedroom window open, and the clean white curtains drawn, so as to keep out the glare and dust; though powerless to keep back the roar and hum of the mighty city which sounded as incessant as the rush of a weir on a great river. By her bedside sat a young curate, a pale anxious curate, such as one meets with in great towns. In crowded busy London, it is impossible for clergymen to visit the sick and dying as they do in country villages, and thousands die daily without the aid of their ministrations. Still, many a heart is cheered and many a soul made more fit for its last great change by the Prayers and Sacraments of the Church and the visits of the clergy. There are many curates living in our large towns denying themselves all but the barest necessities of life that they may spend their lives for those for whom Christ died,—the sick and the sinners.

Young as Mrs. Wilson's friend looked, he had experience enough of life and death to know that over Nancy Wilson's past life hung a curtain which he could not penetrate. She was too ingenious to conceal the care of her life; but he could only conjecture, not fathom, the past. On this hot July afternoon, laying his hand upon her dry, fevered,

wasted fingers, and looking kindly at her worn features, he said : " Does the noise disturb you ?" (for that roar and hum of near and distant sounds, thousands of voices, thousands of wheels, has an effect upon the nerves and brain, more wearing than can be imagined.)

" No, sir," answered Nancy, " I don't hear it. At one time it did worry me a great deal—but since I have taken to my bed I seem ever at my old home in the country. It is the twitter of the birds in the thatch that I hear, and the cawing of the rooks as they feed their young, down in the pleasant places, where I too tended my young, and was as proud as any hen bird over my little brood."

" It is always evident to me," answered Mr. Rose, " that there has been something very painful in your past life, and I have been tender about touching upon it ; but now that you are drawing near to your Judge and my Judge, He requires at my hands that I should warn you, lest you appear in His actual presence with any unrepented sin upon your heart, or any unforgiven repentance. I know not what is the sore place in your memory, but I pray you, I plead with you, to forgive and to ask forgiveness, to repent and pray for pardon."

" Sir," said Mrs. Wilson, " the only person

I sinned against forgave me long ago; and if repentance will avail with God, I trust He too has forgiven, for since my sin my life has been one long penitence. I will tell you, sir, how it was. I married young, and as I had been a flighty giddy girl, folks said it was a good thing and would steady me; and so it did, sir, for a time, and as long as I had two, three, and four children no one could have been more given up to them than I was, and no one could have kept a more comfortable home. My husband was a very small farmer, as his father and grandfather had been before him, but he farmed so little land it was only by making butter and keeping ducks and poultry that we could get on at all. Well, sir, after a time I suppose the devil got hold of me, for though there could not be a kinder husband than mine or pleasanter children, I seemed to get tired of all of them, and when my sixth baby was born I got quite out of heart. It seemed to be all toiling and striving and working and never a step farther on, but on the contrary, more to keep and more to clothe, and no time for rest or holiday. You see, sir, in that sort of life you don't shut up your shutters, and do nothing on a Sunday. You must milk your cows and feed your stock the same one day as another. Well, sir, discontent is like a river

dammed up,—only let a drop come through ever so small a crack; on comes the river till it drowns you. About this time our Squire's gamekeeper was taken bad with rheumatic fever. He was unable to get about and no prospect of getting better by the shooting season. So Mr. Dulcit engaged a young man who had been a clever keeper somewhere among his friends, to come for the time, and he enquired where he could be lodged. We had a roomy house, though we had but little land, and I was for taking him in a lodger. My husband was against it; he said, 'You are always saying you have too much to do already; why take another to look after?' I said the pay would be such a help, and would come like a gift, and a fresh one among us would be company, and be so cheerful. Well, sir, we both kept to our minds but I carried the day, and the young man came to lodge with us. I suppose I made too much of him, for before long he began to talk great nonsense to me, but I believed it all then. He told me that I never ought to have married so young, look at me there, a pretty woman of thirty-five, and I had all the cares of an old woman upon me. He said that if I had waited I might have done so much better than marry a small farmer, and a great deal more that I ought never to

have listened to. One thing led on to another, and at last I began to hate what before I had only tired of, and when the shooting season was over and the fine young keeper going away, what must I do but go with him. I did, indeed, Sir. I left my husband, my good husband, and my six children, for a good-for-nothing chap who was nothing to me. I need not tell you how soon I found out my mistake,—how different this fine fellow was to my own steady old man,—how I longed for my children, and my home only a few hours after I had left them. And all the time what was I to him I had gone with? He had no particular business—he could be keeper in one place and poacher in another, and after the first day or two he cared nothing for me—was it likely! Oh! the misery of that wet cold February; I wonder I lived to the end of it; but on the last day of the month I said to myself, ‘I will rise up and go to my husband and beg him on my bended knees to take me back if it is only as a servant.’ I left my fine gentleman in bed at a time when my John would have been looking for his breakfast after hours of work. At the station I took a ticket for a country station eight miles from my home, and I walked the distance. I had not a pleasant walk, let alone the sin; and the cruel act to my husband and

children, there was such shame! *I* who had held my head above the day-labourers,—there was not a labourer's wife in the parish but was better than I. How could the ladies who were so kind and so friendly to every one treat *me*. No more pleasant words for me from Mrs. Dulcit, and no more of those kind visits from Mrs. Hart. I had made myself a byeword among men and women. Oh! sir, no one knows the value of their good name till they have lost it. Like a beggar I crept up to my own back door. My children, all untidy and uncombed, were about the kitchen,—*such* a kitchen! all disorder and dirt. It was afternoon; my husband was feeding his horses after ploughing; the kettle was on getting ready for his tea. I went in at once, tidied up the room, set out the meal, and washed the children's faces before he came in. I longed for him to come, and yet when he stood in the doorway I dared not go to meet him,—I dared not speak,—I looked at him and clasped my hands. I feared he would drive me out of the house I had shamed, and the home I had ruined. All he said was, 'You have come back, then, have you?—you have not made things very pleasant for me, and I suppose you did not find everything very pleasant for yourself. Well, do your duty now, and I won't

be the first to cast a stone at you.' I could have worshipped him then,—my plain, good, honest man. I settled myself at home and tried to make things *go* right, but ruin had begun. The hen-roost had been robbed while my husband was in a field, and the children out at play. The cows had been sold because there was no one to look after them and make the butter. My eldest child was but eleven; how could she take my place in the household? We muddled on for a year, and then my husband's uncle offered us to join him, and we came to begin life over again. We lived for four years in two rooms and then we moved in here, where everything is as comfortable as need to be. Thank God the children have all turned out so well, and as for their father, never once has he reproached me. May the Lord reward him, sir, and may the Lord forgive me. Amen."





CHAPTER XI.

DEAD AND BURIED.

AND so, Magdalen in heart, Nancy Wilson went to her rest! and who among us can judge her? is she the first penitent on record? or do we read of others whose sins though many were forgiven, because they "loved much." Many a purer life has closed without the burst of grief from survivors, that sprang from the husband and children of the impulsive, active woman, whose life has just been sketched: and many a calm good person might learn a lesson from Nancy, for she had suffered from a temptation to which all are not exposed, and had atoned to the utmost of her power. Can we all say we do this? can we all say we have yielded to *no* temptation? To God and His tender mercies let us leave her.

John Wilson never knew if his children understood the dark spot which had clouded the lives of all of them. The elder ones must remember her absence, but did they know the cause? On the

Sunday after the funeral, all his children dined at home, and sat after dinner talking in their homely fashion among themselves. John took but little heed of them. He was very unhappy, and he sat in an elbow chair with his head bent down, shedding no tears, but pondering over and over the twenty-five years during which she had been his wife. The lively, pretty, but giddy girl, whom he had so greatly loved, and married,—the proud mother and active wife, who had kept such a pleasant home for him for ten years,—then the beginnings of her discontent; had he done all he might have done, he wondered, to help her in her constant round of toil and care? had he always been as tender as he ought to have been, so as to prevent another from seeming to her more for the time, than he was? Then her penitent return, her cast down but diligent industry afterwards, her constant patience, in the trials of her London life, and then in her long illness, and now he had laid her in her cold lonely grave in a London cemetery! The thought fell very cold on his heart, for John was a matter-of-fact man, and his thoughts went more readily to the grave which he saw, than to the Heaven he did not see. And then he wondered how she seemed to her children,—if they

thought of her with as much reverence, as they would have done another ; with genuine love he *knew* they did. Ellen, the married daughter, roused him, by putting her hand on his arm, and saying,

“ Father, we are talking about putting a stone up, on poor mother’s grave. You see these great cemeteries are not like a country churchyard, where you always know your own graves. In a few months we should hardly know where she lay up in that cemetery.”

“ Well, Nelly, what then ? if *you* would not remember do you think the Lord wants a headstone and waits for a notice ? She will rise up at the Day of Judgment as well as those that lie under the fine urns and crosses.”

“ It is not *that*, Father,” continued Nelly, who was deputed by the others to talk to their father, “ but we shall all of us like to go there some times and see where she lies, and take our children who never knew her, and we should like a stone with a few lines on it, like a message from her,—something that should remind us all of her, and not to go wondering which was her grave out of a lot.”

Wilson roused himself and raised his head. “ Nelly, and you all, you don’t want me to tell you how much I cared for your mother. She never

wanted for anything I could provide for her, and her long illness cost me a great deal; and when she died, I buried her well and comfortably, and I asked help of no one, but I won't tell you I could do it all easy. It has cost me a great deal, and it will take me a long time to get before the world again. However, I don't complain. To do it was my duty, and it was my happiness to be able to do it, and it will comfort me all my life long, to know that I did my duty by her from first to last. I never loved but her."

Poor John! he had to wait before he could go on, and tears fell from Nelly, and Jane, while the men and boys looked down and shuffled with their feet.

"Now, as to marking her grave, I did all I could by her in life and death,—and after death, I leave her to her Maker. But do you do among you what you think proper, and if you like to club together and set up a head stone, well! I don't care,—but don't go and write any nonsense upon it, making out she was an angel, when she was only a poor fond woman. When people are dead, that's all the more reason they should have nothing but the truth written about them, or spoken of them."

So Ellen undertook to manage it all, Her brothers and sisters rather wondered at the message they found inscribed on their mother's grave. Wilson looked keenly at Ellen when he read it, and Ellen looked down. So he knew that she certainly remembered and understood the miserable February, that had changed their lives.

ANN, WIFE OF JOHN WILSON,

Aged 46.

Died, July 12th, 18..

"She hath washed my feet with tears and wiped them with the hair of her head." "Thy faith hath saved thee, GO IN PEACE."

St. Luke, 7 ch., v. 45 & 50.





CHAPTER XII.

WHAT CAN IT BE?

IN real life, whether in town or country, events do not happen every day, or every week; on the contrary, daily life is sometimes quite monotonous from its want of incident; even our little faults and shortcomings are small and commonplace. Still, every now and then, wonderful things *do* happen, and become what is called "a nine days' wonder." Even in quiet little villages, and rural nooks, horrible tales could be told, by quaint old trees and quiet ponds if they could but speak. So it came to pass that peaceful little Broadoak was to have its marvel.

When Polly Rogers had been two years at service, she came home for a ten days' holiday. But she came home as Mary Rogers, and excepting from father and mother, did not at all approve of being any longer called "Polly." Many were the kindly greetings and much the interest felt, for the neat, tidy, pleasant looking girl, now nineteen. Somehow, when we feel kindly to all the world,

all the world returns our good feeling, and Mary, sharp and quick-tempered though she might be, was "in charity with all men." About two miles out of Broadoak, was a hamlet called Brentley: it consisted of a common, a few cottages and a mill. The mill and land that went with it belonged to the Dulcit property, but had been rented for generations by one family, ever since a mill had been burnt on the same spot one-hundred-and-fifty years before, and which burning had given the name to the hamlet. The road to Gorton (the market town) passed this common, up a rather steep hill, below which lay little Broadoak, clothed in verdure, and across the common was the cart road to the mill. There was, however, a lane and a little wood (or spiny) which made a far prettier footpath, and was always called a short cut. I need not say that like many other short cuts, it took rather longer than the regular road, but being shadier and more pleasant, it did not require any other reason for being preferred by foot passengers. The family of Edmonds, who occupied the mill, had gone through many "ups and downs," and for several years, nothing but trouble seemed to come. The lingering illness of a husband, the unwise marriage of her son, and at last the conviction of

that son for felony, with his trial and transportation, broke the rest and wearied the heart of a good hard-working woman, and after the son was transported, she had his wife and four children to provide for. She did it, and did it well, keeping the mill in her own hands. She kept the eldest of her grandchildren with her, and started the others in life; fortunately they all turned out steady and honest, and at the time Mary Rogers came home for her holiday, old Mrs. Edmonds had handed over everything to Harry her grandson, and was becoming at last very feeble and old. Harry was an excellent fellow, and seemed to prosper. In fact it was a happy peaceful evening, after her stormy day, that was keenly felt by Mrs. Edmonds, and the burden of her speech was always, "I have had many mercies." Many people wondered to see how evidently well off she was, after all the expenses she had had to bear; and again the wonder was, if Harry would content himself with remaining always in that old woman's house? or would he not now lift up his head, and get a bigger place? No, indeed. The small house, and its small cost of living, enabled Harry to enjoy some solid satisfaction,—he was each year laying by money. His grandmother had every want and wish gratified,

and Harry had only one regret, "I wish little Polly Rogers was not so far off at service."

Naturally enough, Mary had often some reason for going up to the mill, and young Edmonds found every morning of her ten days' holiday something which took him down into Brodok. To see some samples of wheat,—to have his horse shod,—to speak to the carpenter about the window frames that had shrunk in the dry summer. In a word, it was the old, old story, which has gone on from the creation of the world, and will go on till its destruction. One evening, it was September, and the evenings began to have a feeling of autumn about them, Mary had been drinking tea at the mill, and left the house about six, that she might reach home in time for her father's supper. Of course Harry would walk part of the way with her, and of course they took the pleasant shady lane.

At the end of the lane, Edmonds proposed to turn back, but Mary said, "Oh, do come as far as through the spiny, that pond looks so lonesome."

"Not more lonely now than when you came up in the afternoon," laughed Harry.

However, it was not likely he wanted much pressing to go on. Happy at Mary's clinging to

his protection and happy to be with her, and so on they went.

As they neared the pond, Mary whispered, "Harry! look there! under the big tree. Good gracious! it's a man, with his face and head in the water!"

Harry did not answer. Mary looking up into his face, saw his eager eyes strained towards the big tree, whose roots were in the water, and twisted like huge snakes from the pond to the stem of the tree. Among these twisted roots, lay the figure of a man, his head and the upper part of his body in the water.

"You go to the village, Mary, and send some men up to me here; we must get him out, that's certain."

"Oh, but he must be dead," shivered Mary, clinging to Edmonds.

"Dead he is, that's certain; but don't you get into a state. Go and send me some help, that's a good girl."

Mary fled at her utmost speed, and reached the stile leading into the village, with dry throat and spent breath. Fortunately, there she met a neighbour, a strong man returning home from work.

"Oh, Master Betts! do go up directly to the big

tree pond! there is the awfulest thing you ever saw,—a drowned man, lying in the water,—and there is Harry Edmonds all alone with it."

Betts put down his basket, and looked at Mary as if he thought she had gone mad.

So Mary turned off, saying, "Oh, well, if you are afraid to go, I must send some one else."

"Afraid!" answered Betts, *I* aint afraid, the dead chap won't hurt me, but are you *sure* about it?"

"*Sure*," screamed Mary, "Why, bless the man, I saw him myself," and off she ran again in high excitement.

Betts lost no time, he soon reached big-tree pond, and helped Edmonds draw out the unfortunate man from the water. Other neighbours came, and the body was borne between them, to an out-house belonging to the "Rising Sun," to await the inquest.

What news for Brodoak, lying so still in the calm cold light of the harvest moon, as Mary ran up the road! No sound but the distant harvest horn, blown by some tired man, wending his way home,—or voices, sounding so gentle in the distance, though they might be harsh if you were near them, and occasionally a bark from a dog. All her senses quickened in her excitement. She noticed

this evening stillness, as she had never noticed it before, and her own breath seemed the loudest sound in the world to her, as she stood panting at the gate of her father's cottage.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERY.

Poor Mrs. Rogers, who still made a grief and a grievance out of everything, lamented sadly over Mary having to give evidence at the inquest, and being at all mixed up in the mystery of the drowned man, and she carried on her plaint in her old style: "What you wanted up there at all, is more than I can see. You call yourself home for a holiday, and it is not much that *home* sees of you, unless it's just evening or morning. You are always out. One would think you would like to stop a bit with your own mother, and me always ailing! But no; you must go hunting after dead men in a lonely pond."

Mary knew well it was best to let her mother have her complainings out, without arguing or interrupting.

But when Mrs. Rogers drew the long sigh, that was half a moan, which showed she had finished, Rogers struck in, "That's just what *I* want to know, Polly, what were you up at big tree pond for, at all?"

"Well, Father, I had just been teaching old Mrs. Edmonds to turn the heel of her stocking a little more shapely, for she knits a great deal now she cannot get about, and I stópped to have tea with her, and then you know it is a public path ; the horrid part of the whole thing is that the man must have been in the water all day, and so I passed by his dead body without knowing it, in the afternoon."

"Well, then, again, what did Edmonds want away from business? was he learning to knit, too? or is not a mill and a few acres of land occupation enough for him?" and Rogers looked slily at his daughter, who fired up as if he was being very unjust to her friend.

"I am sure no one can accuse Harry Edmonds of neglecting his business, but everybody must get out a little sometimes ; he only came to walk as far as the spiny with me, and I have known him all my life."

"There, there," answered Rogers, "I am not finding fault with Edmonds, he is as good a lad as needs be, yet I would rather not have your name and his put together, as they will be, for you will both have to answer at the inquest to-morrow. I don't like to have folks smiling at you two being

together. Not that any one can say a word against you, my wench. Well, let us see what the coroner can get out of it, for it puzzles me wholly."

* * * * *

The coroner came, and the jury sat, and questions were asked and answered, but nothing could be made out. It was an awful and mysterious thing. The unfortunate man had been at least twenty-four hours in the water; the features, white and swollen, were not known to any one. People came from a distance to enter that fearful shed where the body lay. One after another, quietly treading, as if that sleeper could be awakened, had lifted the handkerchief from his face, and shaking their heads, softly left the place. No one knew him. At a railway station, eight miles distant, a solitary gentleman had arrived the afternoon before the finding of the body, having come from London. The clothes were some of them of foreign make, and (particularly the braces) bore a French name on them. No purse,—no watch,—no pocket-book,—no letter,—or in fact any single thing that could lead to his identification. Yet the cloth clothes were good, and the linen fine, the pocket-handkerchief marked "L. B." An eyeglass, and a pocket comb, were the sole things left

as possessions. So it was clear that either a robbery had been committed first, and then murder, or still worse, that the unhappy stranger had been reduced to utter poverty and destitution, and then deliberately fallen head foremost into the water. The position of the body favoured the latter idea, as a murderer would more likely have plunged the whole body in, but all must be surmise. The most patient jury, and the wisest coroner could unravel nothing, only return a verdict of "Found Drowned," and give an order for interment.

Meanwhile the hot September sun and the great harvest moon travelled, each of them in turn, over the blue vault of Heaven, and the stars came out and shone calmly and peacefully in their appointed places, as if looking down upon "the evil that is done under the sun." While the simple people went on wondering, and wondering, at the unfathomable mystery.





CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST OFFICES OF LOVE.

THERE was one in Brodoak however, who did more than wonder. I must have given but a poor description of the parson, if my readers need to be told how deeply this event pierced his inmost heart,—that tender earnest heart, so full of sympathy for every living creature. It was always grief to him to remember that evil and violence walked abroad in this fair world, but to have it brought home to the very threshold of his beloved peaceful village, was anguish to him.

He pondered, and pondered, between the finding of the body and the inquest. If it were murder, think what horror and dread preceded the last blow! a cry for help must have gone up almost within their hearing: and if it were suicide, what a far worse silent agony was near them, and they knew it not! but in either case, how might it have been averted by human aid? and how many now living around him, for lack of instruction, of help,

and sympathy, might some future day, fall into equal misery? How it behoved him, still more than ever, to warn, to teach, to exhort, but above all to *love* his flock. He was almost tempted to cry,—

“Lord, in Thy field I work all day,
I warn, I teach, I read, I pray ;
And yet these wilful, wandering sheep,
Within Thy fold I cannot keep.”

Many centuries ago, “The Shepherd was smitten,” and there was one who went and begged the Body of his Lord, that love and honour might perform their last offices, and lay Him tenderly in a tomb. With somewhat of the same spirit, Mr. Hart besought the body of this lost sheep, and permission to bury him at his own cost, begging his parishioners to join him in the last offices of brotherly love. His funeral took place on the Sunday after the inquest. No one who saw it will ever forget the solemn, strange impressiveness of the procession. Every man and boy in the parish followed (all of them bareheaded) the bier that bore the body of that forlorn creature taken out of the water. The women, with the ladies from the park and the rectory, were already in the church, when, the great solemn bell tolling over their heads, and Mr. Hart's voice, sounding hollow from the

depth of his emotion, he led the procession up the churchyard path.—“I am the Resurrection and the Life,”—words that now seemed to have wonderful significance. After the body followed the dear old Squire, his face calm and set, but with an expression no one ever had seen before, and his fresh complexion and snow-white hair, appeared in striking contrast above the black pall which covered the coffin. Reverently the bier was carried by the men, who had assisted in bringing the body out of the water. Poor little Mary, in a state of high excitement, sobbed aloud, as the shuffling feet came over the stones of the porch and entered the church; and when at the grave, the service was concluded, Mr. Hart raised his head and said,

“My friends, I entreat you to listen to a few words from me. But for the Grace of God, not one of us who might not lie as this our brother does, alone in a strange place, killed by violence. We, my friends, know not even the language in which he spoke, or the land to which he belonged. To the earth from which we are all taken, we can return his body, and to the God Who knows all things, we commit his soul. But to ourselves, let the lesson go home, that we strive more and more against the beginnings of all that can lead us astray, and that we strive not only for

ourselves but for each other. There have been times in the life now closed, when a word of warning might have been heeded, or a good example followed. 'Am I my brothers's keeper?' Yes, my friends, we are each of us, all of us, our brother's keeper, and for our neglect, our brother's blood may cry to God from the ground. In love we have laid our stranger brother in his lonely grave. Friends! in love let us each pray, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'"

So saying Mr. Hart threw a handful of earth upon the coffin, Mr. Dulcit followed his example, so did most of the men, and then gravely, solemnly, and quietly the little assembly dispersed. Soon Mr. Dulcit placed a plain Latin cross upon this grave, with nothing but the date upon it. Generations must pass before any other record is needed, of what none living can ever forget.





CHAPTER XV.

THE BITTER WINTER NIGHT.

TIME went on; we cannot wait to record all the little daily trials, troubles, and joys, even of our village. Not a house at Brodok but had its tale, could we pause to tell it; but our intercourse having been chiefly with the family of Rogers the drover, let us peep in again at his clean, comfortable cottage, one Monday evening.

Two years have passed since the stranger was buried; his mysterious death was a mystery still. Christmas is close at hand, and Mary is at home again; but now she has left her first place, the young ladies having outgrown the schoolroom, and Mary, before engaging with another situation, is come home for a few weeks. How pleasant the little room looked! No candle was yet lighted, but by the flickering blaze, father, mother, and little Polly sat chatting, only waiting for "the boys" to come home, for supper to begin. Bob gazed into the fire, and thought how pleasantly his girl's

voice sounded, full of the strength of her healthy, happy youth. She went on talking about her young ladies, her fellow-servants, her habits of life, and her work. He looked across the fire at her; how pleasant to him was her face: not a handsome face, but a bright, rosy, happy one; and her neat, upright, active figure, how comely he thought it!

"Polly," he said, "I wonder no one comes sweethearting after you?"

"How do you know they don't, father?" answered Polly.

"Only because, with all your talk, you never mention them, and if you thought about any one, you *would* speak about them."

"Well, father, there have been one or two willing, but I don't care about them. I am in no hurry to marry, and I like service."

"I am sure," broke in Mrs. Rogers, "I wonder you *do* like service; you have had what people call a good place, and yet it seems to me you are no better than a horse in a mill, you are no sooner round than you begin again. It is bad enough to have husband and children to look after, but then you *can* sit down when you are tired, and go to bed when you like, there is no one to call you up again,

when you are dead beat, and no one to keep you standing about when you are ailing."

"Well, mother, ailing people have no business to go to service, and I am sure, one way or another, I always get sleep enough. Service does not hurt me, certainly, and I have learnt many things that will go to make home more comfortable, if ever I have one of my own."

"You are quite right, my wench," said Rogers; "Don't you be in any hurry, you have got your own home to turn to, if you fell ill, and as for marrying, I should not like to see you married to a man that could not keep you comfortable. You always have had a good gown to your back, and good shoes to your feet, and a good supper to end the day. I could not bear to see you toiling and stinting, in a tumble-down cottage, and never a shilling to lay by. Dear me! dear me! I should like to see you marry a young farmer, Polly!"

Polly came over, and knelt down by her father's knee, pulling down his rough head till her mouth was level with his ear, "Would a young miller do for you, father, dear?" she whispered. "I have only to say one word, and I think I will before I go back to service again."

Bob knew very well who the young miller was,

but he liked the coaxing and the confidential whisper, so he pinched her cheek, saying, "And pray who might the young miller be?"

Mary jumped up, saying, "Hush, father, not a word; here come the boys."

As she said this the door opened, and the boys (only two now, for the eldest had enlisted as a soldier) came in laughing, and shaking off the light, newly-fallen snow. "Here's winter! and jolly Christmas weather," said they in a breath.

They brought in with them such a fresh breeze, and such a feeling of keen cold, that Mrs. Rogers turned to the fire shivering, and Polly began to dish up the supper.

"How good that smells," said George, sniffing, "Polly made that, I'll be bound."

"Yes," said the mother, "Polly made it, but I do believe she used half-a-peck of onions for it."

"Half-a-peck, mother! half-a-dozen more likely," answered Polly; and then silence followed, while the whole party did full justice to Polly's savoury mess,—a soup, full of vegetables, a kind of "hodge-podge."

Rogers was the first to break silence, pushing away his empty plate, he said, "Very good, certainly, but more fit for a farmer or a miller than for

roared round the house, came the cry of distress, that went to the heart of Mary Rogers.

"Oh, dear father! do let me fetch her in; she can sleep with me. Oh, Betts must be harder than a mill stone. What does he think Emma is to do this time of night, in the wind and snow? *You* could not be so cruel, father?"

"I don't know how hard I might be, if I was tried," answered Rogers. "I am not blaming Betts, he gave her a good start, and a good warning, and he has his other children to think of. But I do think he might get some shelter for the girl, such a night as this. Here, you youngsters, get you all to bed. Mother and I will let her in, and she shall sit by the fire for the night, and be off before dawn. I must be off early myself, after some Christmas beasts, and I will start her, she must go to the Union."

And hard in word, and tender in deed, Rogers fetched the poor wailing outcast in to his warm comfortable room. Mrs. Rogers heated some soup and gave her, with very few words; then Bob fetched a rug, and laid before the fire, and his drover's coat he hung on a chair by it, saying, "There make yourself as comfortable as you can, and get some sleep, but you must be up and off

before my girl comes down, I shall be up betimes and I will rouse you. You must go straight to the Workhouse. You are not the first there, in your sort of trouble, and they will do well by you."

"I take it very kind of you, Master Rogers," sobbed poor Emma. "Folks are so hard upon me, as if it was all my fault."

"So it is your fault, don't talk nonsense to me. Folks that mean to keep dry footed, don't go and walk in the water. There, don't take on, get what rest you can, and good night;" and the rough, good Samaritan shut the room door, and followed his wife upstairs; and poor Emma sobbed herself to sleep before the fire went out, and while heat enough lingered in the hearth, to dry her wet clothes, and send warmth into her frame. Meanwhile, Polly in her own little room, remembered the only scolding she had ever had from her father, and also remembered the words of Mr. Hart, over the drowned man's grave, "But for the grace of God, we might lie as this our brother does." Little Polly fell asleep, with a deep sense of what she owed to her earthly father, and to her Father in Heaven. "But for the grace of God, it might be me!" was her last feeling, that bitter winter's night.



CHAPTER XVI.

WHERE IS ROGERS?

“**W**HERE is your husband, Mrs. Rogers,” said Mr. Purdy, the butcher, putting his head in at Rogers’s cottage door on the Saturday afternoon following the evening we have just been narrating.

“Where is my husband?” replied Mrs. Rogers; “why, gone to Bromwich after some bullocks for you.”

“He was at Bromwich, and I started him off on Wednesday morning myself in charge of the beasts; and I charged him not to go more than fifteen miles a day with them; that would have brought him home last evening. I made sure he would be in by dark, and here is Saturday afternoon and he not come, and nothing heard about him.”

“I never knew him late, before,” said the wife; “a bit earlier than you expect he does sometimes come, but later, not he!”

“Well, it’s across-country road, and my hands are full enough; but I must send a man on to try

and meet him, for I must have those beasts for Christmas. It's very awkward." And the butcher walked quickly off, full of his fat bullocks, and thinking very little of the man who drove them, except as responsible for the beasts.

But poor Mrs. Rogers sat stunned, rocking herself to and fro in her low chair by the fire ; her blood was chilled, and "my heart in the midst of my body feels even like melting wax," would have described her feelings best. "He thinks about nought but his senseless beasts," moaned she ; "oh my man ! my man ! if harm has come to him what shall I do !" and the poor woman covered her face with her apron and sobbed aloud.

The door opened, and a sharp-tongued quarrelsome neighbour looked in : "What's this about Rogers being lost ? They do say he is gone off far enough with the money he has sold Mr. Purdy's Christmas beasts for."

"You good-for-nothing woman, what do you mean?" cried Mrs. Rogers, roused up in a moment. "My husband gone off with another man's money ! stuff and nonsense ! and you know it ; he is only a trifle later than Mr. Purdy expected ; most likely over-tender with the beasts,—perhaps one of them went lame, who knows?"

"Oh, no," was the answer; "if one went lame Rogers would have left that behind and come on with the rest. Why they are for the Christmas beef, bless you! Rogers knew the value of them pretty well. But perhaps he may have been made away with himself by someone, who would drive the beasts on and sell them somewhere else. Ah! you will know the value of him when you have lost him, — a good hearted man; and you always worritting him."

"You talk about worritting! You never heard me raise my voice against him. No, nor fling a brush at him, and let him go to work with a black eye; and before you come slandering me, you ought to know what folks say about you. 'There is no one can live in peace within sound of your tongue; you drive your husband from home to the 'Rising Sun,' and then you go and beg for clothes that the money he spends there would buy for the children. I don't mind telling you what you are; so now be off, and don't come darkening my doors again in a hurry!" and warm with her anger, and wretched with her suspense, poor Mrs. Rogers turned again to the fire, and did not see that as her neighbour went away her Parson came up.

Wherever trouble or sickness came, there was

Mr. Hart cheering, consoling, supporting. It always seemed as if a quiet gleam of sunshine entered the room with him. He sat down in the chair next to Mrs. Rogers, and waited till her excitement calmed down a little.

"The saucy hussy ! I cannot bear her ! but I spoke my mind to her," she murmured.

"I am no friend to what you call speaking your mind," said Mr. Hart ; "one word makes ten, you know, and the more you speak the more ill blood you raise. However, I know how difficult it is to hold one's peace when one is irritated ; it is little by little we learn patience. Where is Mary ? not gone to service again,—is she ?"

"No, sir ; she is spending the day with old Mrs. Edmonds, and she was to be back by tea time. Oh, dear me ! I do wish she would come, for I am all of a tremble. They will have it something is wrong with my husband, and I don't know what to do nor what to think."

"I will go and send Mary home at once," said Mr. Hart ; "she will be your best comfort at present, though no one can really comfort you, as all is uncertainty. We can only wait and *pray*," he added, earnestly, pressing his hand on hers.

"Oh, sir! do you pray for me; I don't know what to say!"

"I will pray for you as I walk along; cry to the Lord from your own heart in your own words. God needs not that you should put your prayer into words,—‘I cried unto the Lord in my trouble,’—‘It is the cry of the helpless child that reaches the ear of the tender Father,’—‘Tarry thou the Lord’s leisure; be strong, and He shall comfort thine heart, and put thou thy trust in the Lord.’ God bless you.” And Mr. Hart was leaving the house, when he turned round saying, “I think if I were you I would lock the door till Mary comes in; you are better without neighbours who speak their minds.”





CHAPTER XVII.

TO PARISH CLERKS AND OTHERS.

“TO PARISH CLERKS AND OTHERS, £10 REWARD.”

“Wanted, the Certificate of Burial of Luigi Barnet, supposed to have died in England in the Autumn of 18 . . . Said Luigi Barnet was 45 years of age, 5 feet 10 inches in height ; dark eyes, hair, and whiskers. Spoke English with a slightly foreign accent. Was known to be in a low desponding state of mind, and fond of wandering in lonely places. Last heard of at the White Horse Hotel, Stanton, Lincolnshire ; at which place he left his portmanteau. Information to be given to J. Greenby, Detective Office, Essex Street, Strand.”



HIS advertisement had been enclosed in a letter, and sent to “old Smith” by his son, a tradesman in London, who very naturally surmised that his father was not likely to see it unless it were sent to him, though the description certainly read very like that of the stranger found drowned at Broadoak four years ago. Nobody at Broadoak took in or read any newspaper but the local one, except Mr. Hart and Mr. Dulcit ; but as neither squire or parson troubled themselves much with the advertisement columns, it might have been long enough before the idea

reached old Smith (unless his son had put it into his head) to make some enquiries.

Now it always took a long time for anything to get into old Smith's head, and it also took a long time to uproot anything that had once found an entrance. He had to read over the advertisement five or six times before he took in the full meaning of it, and even then it only seemed to set him off "harping on the old string" of how things had changed. He sat in the clean little parlour behind his shop, with coat and gaiters that a Quaker might have worn, boots,—black and polished, strong and well made,—and looking as if neither dust or mud ever came near his substantial respectable person. His quiet wife sat opposite to him, darning stockings. Mrs. Smith always was darning stockings when she was not attending to customers, and no one ever saw her in the afternoon, without her thimble on, and a skein of darning cotton across her arm. She had lived for many years as nurse in a gentleman's family before she married Smith, and had brought to her husband's home, not only the neat and orderly ways of a good upper servant, but the cultivated understanding that comes from living with thinking and educated people. She was a woman who had herself read and thought,

and she could have answered questions which would puzzle some of the young folks who carry off prizes at National schools. There she sat, patiently listening to her husband, who talked on, half to her, half to himself.

“‘To Parish Clerks and Others.’ Well, but who is the parish clerk, I should like to know? When I was a boy, we used to take folks in, by saying to them, ‘What’s a clock?’ And they would say, ‘Half-past four,’ or whatever the time might be, and then we would say, ‘No it ain’t, it is a man that says ‘Amen.’ But there is no such thing as a man that says ‘Amen,’ now-a-days! All the people say ‘Amen,’ and ‘miserable sinners,’ and all the rest of it. And there is no shutting the minister into his pulpit, or helping him change his gown, or anything. The minister does everything for himself, now-a-days, and the people do everything for themselves. No pew doors to open and no pulpit door to shut, and the Church door always open. All the bells rung by a new-set-up set of ringers, and if it was not that dead folks can do nothing, I do think the people would dig their own graves; but, no, I must do *that* for them, and that is just what I have come to, I am nothing but a sexton. What’s the use of sending to me as ‘Parish Clerks

and Others?' I suppose I am the 'Others,' then, for I am not the 'Parish Clerk,' that's sure and certain."

"Suppose you go over to Mr. Hart, and talk to him about it," suggested Mrs. Smith. "He keeps the parish register, and he would be able to make out more about it, than we can. It does seem very likely to be the poor creature he buried here, and Mr. Hart would be right glad to hear something about his friends, and you see he must have friends that care about him, or they would not offer ten pounds reward. Ten pounds would drop very pleasantly into our till, Mr. Smith."

"But don't you see, Ann, the ten pounds will go to them that give the information. If Mr. Hart gives the information, and lets out that *he* keeps the parish register, why of course the ten pounds will go to him. I am not going to say he would keep it, he would turn it over to do something for the parish, but the parish is not *me*. You know as well as I do, that I can't make much hand at letter-writing, but I might tell James to write to this detective, or go to him."

"But even then they would have to come back to Mr. Hart for the certificate of burial: it is that they will pay for, not the news that a man was

drowned in our parish, whose linen was marked 'L. B.' You must go to Mr. Hart sooner or later, and I don't think it is handsome not to go to him at once, so kind as he was about the poor creature, and so willing as he always is to help."

Smith was sorely perplexed, so he began to worry again about the old ways, fancying that in bygone days, he could have managed somehow to secure the ten pounds to himself, and that he ought to get it now, as it was offered to parish clerks, and he had always been parish clerk, and so was his father before him.

"And he thought a great deal of himself, did my father, I can tell you, Ann. You should have seen him on a Sunday, when he used to shut old Mr. Drone in the pulpit, and look over the door to see that he was comfortable, and then he would come creaking down the steps (there was nine steps and a landing to our old pulpit), and shaking his head as if he would say, 'Ah, he can say what he likes up there, but it was I that put him in, and it will be I that will let him out, for all that,' and then he would settle himself into his own little desk, and make his plans for the week, for what with rubbing his eyes, and shifting his spectacles, Mr. Drone always made out an hour between the

text and the blessing ; and so you see, Ann, people had plenty of time to think."

"Mr. Smith," pursued Ann, "dont you think all this talk does no good ? those dreary sort of days are gone and done with, they did not last long, only about the lifetime of four old men, like your father. Folks seem to have been asleep till about thirty years ago, but the time when your father's grandfather was born was very different to what you call the 'old times,' and much more like our ways now, that you call 'new fangled.' Come, now, do you go over to Mr. Hart, and see what he thinks about it all. You only get worse and worse puzzled thinking over it yourself."

But Smith would not stir till his tea was over and cleared away, and then he put on his best hat, took up his stick, and slowly and heavily stepped over to the rectory.

When he came home he told his wife Mr. Hart was a *real* gentleman, for though he had promised to take all the trouble of writing to the detective officer in London, and sending the burial certificate, he had said, as he bid him good night, "It will be a good day's work for you, Smith ; ten pounds does not come to one every day in the week."

"Which looks as if he did not mean to keep the money himself, don't it, now?" said Smith, "and it makes me feel a little sorry I said so much about the many sixpences I lost, by the church door being always open, so that I never have to go up and let gentlefolks in who come to see the church now-a-days."

"And you know well enough, Smith, that if you do lose a sixpence now and then by the open church, I, and others besides me, have gained what no sixpences would give. No one that has not tried it can tell the comfort and the peace that comes into your heart, by just going into a church to be quiet, and think a bit, or put up a quiet prayer in a holy place,—to get away from your little troubles and trials, and just lay your heart before the Lord, as Hezekiah did."

"You talk of troubles and trials! There are few people get so few troubles and trials as you do, I reckon; I don't think you have much to complain of in your life, Ann."

"No, thank God, that is true enough, and I am thankful for it; but I have had my troubles to bear, John."

And Ann's eyes filled with tears, as she thought of two graves in the churchyard, a long one and a

little one, and remembered that at each of them, the whole sunshine of her life had seemed to be buried there with her buried darlings. And were not the little socks of the baby still treasured by her; and the shawl that had wrapped up the girl of sixteen, was it not a relic she touched so gently from time to time, as, looking at it, brought back to her the sweet faint smile that could never be forgotten, but of which she loved to think as belonging to an angel in Heaven?

Passing over these griefs with a sigh, Ann added, "And I have my little trials, too; customers are trying when they won't pay, and the bread is trying when it won't rise; and you are rather trying yourself sometimes, Mr. Smith," she said with a quiet smile, as she poured hot water on to the rum in his tumbler.

Mr. Smith was a prosperous man, as we said before, and he liked something "comfortable" to end the day with; and Ann was a good wife, and though he sometimes tried her temper, she kept a pleasant fireside for him, and was fond of him, and but for his pleasant tidy home, Mr. Smith would have been a frequenter of the "Rising Sun."





CHAPTER XVIII.

LUIGI BARNET.

MR. Hart was as good as his word, and took all the trouble on himself. He wrote to Detective Greenby, sent the report of the coroner's inquest, and the certificate of burial, and expressed such an interest and anxiety about the stranger to whom he had acted so loving and charitable a part, as led to further correspondence between himself and the relatives of the drowned man. It was not all at once that the story became known to him, but as it unfolded itself it was as follows:—

There had once lived in Warwickshire, a rich and influential gentleman, named Barnett, whose only son formed an attachment and married an Italian actress. He trusted that his father would in time forgive the imprudent step, and receive his wife; indeed, when struck with paralyses, the old man tried hard to make those round him understand that there was something he wished to have done; but from the time of his stroke till his death

he was never once able to speak or write, and when after death his will was opened, and found to have been made soon after the marriage of his son, while he was full of anger and resentment, no doubt was felt that he intended by a fresh will, to have made a fresh disposition of his property. But the injustice had been done, and repentance came too late, and young Barnet found himself instead of a rich landed proprietor, only a homeless man, with about £600 a year, which he had inherited from his mother. Brought up in the expectation of having as many thousands, and with the tastes and habits of a rich man, this income appeared to him wretchedly small, and one upon which it would be impossible to live in England. Therefore he retired, with his wife and his two children, to the north of Italy, and there passed the rest of his life happily and contentedly. He had only two children, the eldest, a daughter, married an Italian nobleman, and very naturally grew up a thorough Italian herself. But with the son it was quite otherwise, all his sympathies and feelings were English, and from his boyhood he had a strong yearning to revisit his native country. Partly to gratify Luigi, and partly from his own love of fatherland, Mr. Barnet and his son spent

one summer in England, when the latter was scarcely twenty years old, and that which had hitherto been only a feeling on Luigi's part, became a morbid passion, deepening with every year he lived. At the death of his father, Luigi having sufficient income to live without working for his support, was able to visit England each year, and at the same time he indulged a continual brooding over the iniquities of his grandfather's will. Each summer, when the heat of Italy became too great, Luigi came over to England; he generally visited a different part each year: he would live at some hotel in a town, and make solitary excursions into rural districts, making no friends and very few acquaintances; and after our short summer and autumn were passed, and chilling winds warned the migratory birds that the time was come for leaving our cold climate for sunshine and brightness, Luigi would also return, generally unannounced, to his sister's home. When at last winter came and no Luigi returned as usual, it was not at first that Madame Solfa became alarmed, and even when her fears were aroused, she did not know what steps to take. Not for three years after the finding of Luigi's body was the English detective force applied to, and even then the advertisement quoted

in the last chapter had been frequently inserted in the *Times*, before it was seen by James Smith, in London, and sent to old Smith, at Broadoak. But though the advertisement had not been answered from Broadoak, it had been responded to from a great many other places, and from the number of unknown bodies found dead in different parts of England, it would appear that such deaths are matters of every day occurrence.

Think of this, my readers, as you sit by your firesides, or in your pretty gardens, in your own safe sweet homes, and give a passing thought to the numbers of forlorn desolate creatures who this night or this day are wandering along the edge of that precipice, which is beside every one of us, but which the wretched seek, while the happy avoid it. True we all of us walk as it were upon ice that may at any moment break under our feet, and as one or another of us vanishes into the cold eternal waters, what are our little silly jealousies, our petty rivalries, our fancied injuries? But besides this too plain fact, which however we do not realise, there is this dreadful truth, that for every unknown body found, a number of anxious people will come forward to see if it is a dear one missing, and for every person known to be missing, a number of

notices will come forward of bodies found, unknown and unclaimed. And when you pray for those who travel by land and by water, pray, Oh, pray, for those who are wandering with darkened hearts, and deadened faith, and no hope! NO HOPE!

Even now, that to a certain extent the mystery was solved, and "our brother," as Mr. Hart had truly called Luigi, was owned, there was still a doubt, whether he had fallen exhausted and fainting into the water, or if, his brooding having become intolerable, he had ended his life and his fancied injuries on purpose. Let us cling, as Mr. Hart and Madame Solfa did, to the former idea; and let us say "Hush," to old Smith, as he stirs his rum-and-water, and with a complacent smile says, "Anyways, I've got the ten pounds."





CHAPTER XIX.

THE ANXIOUS WAITING.



WHO shall describe the misery of that Sunday ! Many persons who read this book have gone through such a day, and thought it would never come to an end. They will remember how every footstep made them start ; how the heart sank at the sound of wheels. The very daylight seemed oppressive, and they longed for night, with the feelings of privacy and shelter that come with the darkness, and they could feel shut up with their sorrow.

When Mr. Hart had reached Brentley Mill on Saturday afternoon, he found the ill news had preceded him, and Mary was listening with starting eyes to a tale of her father robbed and murdered, which was being calmly told her by a village boy big with the importance of his wonderful story. It seemed quite a relief to the poor girl to hear from Mr. Hart that Rogers was only missing after all, and she went home prepared to feel all would soon come right. However, when she reached her home, she caught

the infection of anxiety and suspense that bore down her poor feeble mother ; she found the fire nearly out, the room looking strangely cheerless, and no preparation for tea or supper, and Mrs. Rogers moaning to herself as she sat on her low chair. Poor little Polly had never felt a care before this, and it fell with heavy aching upon her young heart. Then when the boys came home what news to greet them with ! No one had much care for their supper that night in the drover's cottage. All the information the evening brought was that Mr. Purdy had sent a man in a cart to go the whole way to Bromwich, if he did not hear news before reaching that place. Rogers was to sleep two nights on the road, so at one of these villages something should be learnt of him. It was a cross-country road, and the roads were in a very bad state with the snow and frost. On Sunday the wildest stories flew about. Somebody had heard somebody say that somebody had seen somebody very like Rogers in a third class carriage, in a train going from Bromwich to London, and dressed like a quaker. Somebody else knew for certain that he had gone to Australia. None of the Rogers family could bring themselves to go to church that day ; and, rather than do nothing, George and Alfred walked on the same road their father would

come and the butcher's man had taken ; it was without any definite hope or idea, but they could not stop indoors, they felt they must do something.

Harry Edmonds looked in after church on his way home, and Mary, who was too unhappy to hide her feelings, let them have full vent to him ; her mother seemed too absorbed to care for the feelings of another.

"Oh, Harry ! I kept dreaming all night ; I heard the bells ringing a muffled peal for my father. Oh ! those bells, how they kept tormenting me. Then I dreamt they were tolling the great bell for his funeral ; and then I heard him say again, as he said once before to me, that he would rather hear that bell sounding for me, than that I should bring shame on him and my mother. Oh, Harry ! can't you take your horse and cart and go all the way after him ?" then, remembering that she had no right to ask so much from one to whom she was in no way bound, burst out again,—“Oh, what am I saying ! I don't know *what* I mean, Harry.”

“But I know what I mean,” said Harry ; “and you know too, Mary, well enough. Mrs. Rogers, I would do anything for you. I would be your son if Mary would let me. It is not that I am not willing and more than willing to go, but I don't see what

more I could learn than Purdy's man will. Let alone. I have only one horse, and I dare not take her forty-five miles over these roads, and back ; but I will see Purdy this evening, and be the first to bring you any news he gets, come when it may. Cheer up, Mary ; you shall have the bells ringing for you and me, and not for your father."

Night came, still freezing. The village boys ran merrily down the street, rejoicing over their slide on the shallow pool below the hill. The sons came home with very little comfort, the only comfort being that they had learned nothing bad. The people at the next village had seen Mr. Purdy come home late Wednesday evening ; Rogers had gone to Bromwich by Parliamentary train on Tuesday, having only walked to Gorton to meet it, so nothing had been seen of him either way. On Monday afternoon the news flew about that the butcher's man had found the bullocks, but no Rogers ! that he had sent word to this effect to his master, and that he would bring the beasts home by Monday evening. Harry Edmonds said he would wait to hear what more could be learned from this man before doing anything, and Mrs. Rogers and Mary could only go on waiting, waiting ! About ten o'clock at night, when the little village was asleep, and no sound heard but the occa-

sional hoot of the old owl, a few pebbles were thrown at Mrs. Rogers's bedroom window, for the whole house was dark. In a moment her head was out of the open window.

"I was afraid you would not be awake, Mrs. Rogers," said the voice of Edmonds.

"How should I be other than awake when I don't know if my husband is a living man or a dead corpse."

"He is not a dead corpse, I am happy to tell you," answered Harry. "Come and let me in, and I will tell you all about him."

The little Harry had to tell was soon told. The butcher's man had known that Rogers must sleep at two out of three large villages lying between the great town of Bromwich and the little village of Broadoak, to break the journey for the fat beasts; and therefore at these places he made his chief enquiries, and found at a small place between these towns, that some fat beasts had been found straying about without any drover, and had been put in a pound. He had claimed them directly, and started off home without loss of time, but had fortunately met with a policeman to whom he told the tale of the missing drover, and bade him enquire along the road, and send word directly he heard any news of him. This news had

come sooner than was expected. The policeman had found that about two miles from the village where Purdy's man found the bullocks, a man had been found lying senseless on his back, at the crossing, a little ford, frozen over, in the middle of the road. Evidently he had slipped on the ice and fallen on his head. Being a heavy man, and falling heavily, he had had a concussion of the brain, and, although evidently conscious, he had neither moved nor spoken. He had been found by an old man who lived alone with his old wife at a cottage near this ford, a somewhat lonely part of the road, and two miles from the nearest village, having only a farm house and one or two more cottages near. These old people knew Rogers by sight, having seen him pass from the Bromwich fair and Christmas sale at different times, but they knew nothing of who he was or where he came from, and, to people who live by labour in the fields near their own dwellings, places thirty miles off are perfectly unknown. The good souls took him into their house, and nursed him carefully ; the parish doctor had seen him, and said with perfect quiet he might get over it, but it would be some days before he ought to be moved home.

"And I will drive you over to see him to-morrow if you like," said Harry ; "though as he is to be

kept so quiet, perhaps we had better wait a bit, and send him word we will come soon."

It was a difficult journey to contemplate,—thirty miles over cross roads covered with frost and snow. Mrs. Rogers, with all her love and anxiety, shrunk from it, and the good fellow Edmonds made all arrangements for bringing her husband home, drove over to Hartop, the village nearest to the little ford, and slept there, resting his mare for the night also, and then carefully and gently drove Rogers home. Was not that a joyful evening at the cottage!

Though "Father" was very much pulled down by his accident and confinement he was very quietly happy. "You can't think," he said, "how often, when I lay there and could not speak, the thought came into my mind of Betts's poor girl warming herself over my fire. I am not blaming Betts, but I *was* glad I had taken her in."





CHAPTER XX.

POLLY'S TROUBLES.

CASUAL mention has been made of the large farmer of Broadoak, a certain Mr. Pendally. He was a busy, bustling, important man, not very large, but you could never be in a room with him without feeling conscious that Mr. Pendally was an important person. He looked all necktie, rode good horses, kept a very nice phaeton for his wife, and everybody considered the whole family very "high." Mr. Dulcit used to chat easily with the poor people of Brodok, and have a joke with them. Mr. Pendally thought, on the contrary, that they ought to be kept in their places, and the family were as the father was. No one ever doubted but that they had good means, for the ways of living at Mainwater farm were rather expensive for farmers. The Miss Pendally's bonnets every summer caused quite a sensation, and altogether the young ladies were very much talked about and thought about by the village girls. This interest was very much quickened when it was observed during this winter that young

Edmonds was getting into a habit of walking home from church with them, and that Mr. Pendally often looked in at the mill now-a-days.

Now Mary Rogers had never felt any doubt about Harry being her devoted lover. She thought she might put him off and tease him as long as she liked, but she had only to hold up her finger and Edmonds would become her slave. Often had she saucily tossed her head and said, "Oh, there's time enough to think about that."

But after he had so tenderly brought Rogers home to his family Harry did not so often come to the cottage. This made Mary a little uneasy, but she put it away from her mind, and carefully nursed her father during the time he required care ; and then, as the days grew longer and he seemed quite well, she began thinking again about going to service. One evening in February she went up to drink tea with her old friend Mrs. Edmonds ; she went with an undefined feeling of care, and half wished that something would decide her in starting off to look for another place. She found the old lady quite alone ; cheerful she always was, but this evening the cheerfulness was a little resigned, and she seemed to have something on her mind. It was not likely Mary would ask where Harry was ; she saw there was no

cup prepared for him, and she waited impatiently till his grandmother should mention him ; but the early tea was over before she did so, and then it was quite casually.

"How the days are getting out," she said. "I have had my tea by daylight the last fortnight ; it seems to make the evenings shorter, and you can put off lighting a candle longer than when you sit doing nothing ; now I am so much alone of an evening they do seem long sometimes."

"I can come up oftener now, Mrs. Edmonds," said Mary, thinking the old lady meant that she had not come to see her ; "father is quite well now, and till I go to service again I can come up as I used to do."

"Thank you kindly, my dear ; but I was not thinking of you ; not but what I am always glad to see you, Mary ; you always were a favourite of mine ; but it's Harry being so much at the Mainwater farm makes me a little lonely ; he is almost always up at Pendally's of an evening."

There came a great lump in poor Mary's throat, and a cold hand seemed laid on her heart ; not a word could she say, but she kept repeating to herself over and over again, "always up at Pendally's !" Soon she roused herself, saying, "Well, I must be off

home ; father does not like me to be after dark, you know. Good night, Mrs. Edmonds."

"Good night, Mary. Ah, me ! we can't have things go as we wish in this world. After all I have gone through I ought not to look for it ; but there, I have had many mercies ; so have you, Mary, and when you come to my time of life you will know it."

Poor little Polly ; as she trod quickly along the dirty road in the twilight she hardly felt the ground under her feet ; she was not only unhappy, she was so angry,—angry with Harry, angry with Miss Pendally, but, most of all, so angry with herself. "How often I might have had him ; and now he is gone altogether ; it is not likely if such as Miss Pendally looks kindly on him that he will waste another thought on me, a poor drover's daughter ! a domestic servant ! and there, I do love him so ; and I can never tell him ! never, never !"

"You are over late, Polly," said Rogers gruffly, as she entered the house. He sat by the fire and hardly looked up at her, and she saw he was vexed. "You are too late, I say ; what have you done with Edmonds ?"

"I have done nothing with Harry ; I have not even seen him."

"What, have you not been up at the mill ?"

"Yes ; I have been drinking tea with old Mrs. Edmonds ; but Harry was not at home, he was up at Pendally's ; he is always at Pendally's now."

Rogers gave a long whistle. "Oh, that's it, is it ; what is all that for ?"

"I am sure *I* don't know," said Mary ; "but it is nothing to me where he goes ; I am going off myself soon, and I must think about my own affairs. You are all right now, father, so I will go over to Gorton and see that Mrs. Brown who is looking for a housemaid ; I want to be at work again. I know very well I am a good servant, and I shall be best in a good place again ; only let me know what I have got to do, and I put my will into it and do it, but I cannot stand loitering at home."

Rogers saw very well Mary wanted to put him off the subject of Edmonds at the Mainwater farm, and he had gone through a courtship and its little cares himself in his day. He knew very well that we cannot all of us marry the person we love best, and if we cannot we are best hard at work, and not fretting for what is out of reach. He did not wish to give pain, so for a time he held his peace, and only looked into the fire while he mused over it all. He had had such a pleasant dream in his head for the last two years, fancying the day would come when he should

see his little Mary mistress up at the mill. He liked Edmonds and his steady ways ; and then, that whisper of Polly's the night before his last long journey had made him feel so sure about it. Again and again while he lay ill at the cottage of the old people near the ford, it had so cheered him to think, " I shall leave my little wench well provided for, bless her." Then, how like a tender and good son had Edmonds been to him on that return journey, giving up his own time and his one horse to bring him home ; and now it was to end in his only daughter,—his youngest child—his chief treasure,—going out again to service, and Edmonds " always up at Pendally's." He gave a great sigh !

" I won't say you nay, my wench," he said, " I won't say you nay ; but I am not the man I was before my accident, and I wish I could keep you near me. You always seem to me like a robin hopping and chirping about, and you look like a robin too, with your bright eyes and your little round head. I wish I could see you sitting on your own nest before I go up out of sight in the blue sky." This was altogether too much for little Polly ; she knelt down by him and hid her face on his broad chest, sobbing out, " I must go, father ; I must go ! I could never stop at home and see *him* marry *her*."

Mrs. Rogers, who had not been so ailing or complaining since the illness of her husband, looked on and understood it well ; she made no lamentations now, only said, as she stooped over the fire and stirred some porridge, " She is quite right, father ; she had better go."





CHAPTER XXI.

GLEAMS OF SUNSHINE.

MARY ROGERS was not one to let the grass grow under her feet, so the next morning she was up betimes, and off on her walk to Gorton, a good six miles, and so, a two hours' walk. She was at Mrs. Brown's house by ten o'clock, but early as it was she was too late; Mrs. Brown had engaged a housemaid the day before. So Mary went to the principal shops to enquire, and then hearing of nothing likely to suit her, started off home again.

It was a bright, fine day, and just the morning to raise people's spirits, they hardly knew why. It was quite the end of February; the early spring sun was shining, and the trees cast distinct shadows of their leafless branches on the ground,—that clear, defined shadow, which looks so cheery and pleasant after the pale gleams shed by the wintry sun. Then, overhead and around her, birds were twittering and singing, and the ploughs were at work on each side of

the road, the ploughmen calling to their horses in a hearty tone, far brighter than any sounds heard with the autumn field work.

Mary felt the hopeful gleams of spring sunshine sink into her heart and mind ; her spirits rose ; she planned that she would go again to Mrs. Hart and Mrs. Dulcit, as she had done in her early girlhood, and ask them to recommend her if they should hear of a place : and, hopefully building castles in the air, she began to sing as she caught sight, from the top of the hill, of that snug little village to which she belonged lying in the sunshine. But as she came over the Brentley common, she heard a horse and cart coming behind her, the sound of which silenced her hymn of praise. She knew the sound of the horse's hoofs, and believed there was no other horse in England put its feet down as that one did ; and she knew very well who would be in the cart, and that at the end of the common, horse and cart and driver would turn round to the pleasant mill house where once she might have lived, which, till yesterday, she thought of as her second home. It seemed impossible to believe it was only last evening that her misgivings became a certainty, so long ago did it appear. Mary had no wish to talk to Miss Pendally's favourite, so she looked straight on, and rather quickened her

pace. But the horse did *not* turn round at the corner; on the contrary, it came on, slower and slower, and at last was walking close to her.

"Mary!" said the voice she loved so well.

She could not help looking up; not a word came, but she had a tell-tale face, and Edmonds saw the expression on it was not the old familiar one; she looked at him as an acquaintance, not as a dear friend.

"What is the matter, Mary?" No answer. "Come home and have dinner with grandmother; I missed you last evening, and it is so long since we had you at the mill."

"Thank you; I can't come to-day; I want to get home."

"They will not be looking for you so early as this at home. I know where you have been; I saw you in Gorton, though you did not see me, and if you get home by tea time they will be quite easy about you. It is not the first time you have turned in at the mill instead of going home."

"What *has* been is not always what *is* to be," said Mary quietly. "I can't come, Edmonds, so good-bye."

Harry jumped out of the cart, and hung the reins over his arm as he walked by Mary's side.

"Why do you look so strange at me? and why do you call me Edmonds? was I not always 'Harry' to you? Why cannot you make up your mind, and take me for better and for worse? You know you may have me and all that's mine, and you will bluff me off and pretend you don't care about me; and you know very well how much I care for you; it is not kind of you, Mary! Say you will be my wife, and come to my house for good and all."

A heavy load seemed to be lifted off poor little Polly; but all she said was, "What will Miss Pendally say?"

"Miss Pendally may say what she likes, it won't make any difference to me; a woman that plays the piano and goes untidy of a morning would not be much use to me."

"Oh! if you want somebody just to be of *use* to you," answered Polly, "you had better hire a servant and pay her wages, and then you will understand one another. If ever I marry it won't be to have someone that will be of *use* to me; as long as I can support myself with my own hands I will do it, and I would scorn to marry for anything of that sort."

"Now Mary, you will go off in a tease all for nothing; you know better than I can tell you that I am more fond of you than anyone in the world;

you know it,—in your real heart you do,—but you will pretend you don't. Tell me you will be my wife, and I will come down and see your father this evening, and have the banns put up at once, by next Sunday, or you will be taking huff about nothing and changing your mind."

"Well, come and see what father says," was all he could get from Polly; but it was enough for Harry Edmonds, who sprang into his cart, and drove briskly home to his dinner, while Mary, light of step and light of heart, went down the hill to Broadoak, singing like a lark.

"Well, Polly," said her mother, "did you see the lady? have you got the place?"

"I saw the lady, mother, and her place was gone; but I have engaged with another place, and I am going to it after Easter."

Mrs. Rogers saw joy in the bright face,—heard it in the hearty voice,—felt it, as we feel by instinct when those we love are very happy.

"No, Polly!" she said, "is it up at the mill?"

"Yes, mother, if father is willing."

Was he willing?





CHAPTER XXII.

EASTER.

“**C**HRIST is RISEN!” rang the bells. “Christ is risen” was Mr. Hart’s joyous and reverend greeting (as it was of the early Christians) to all whom he met, and “CHRIST IS RISEN” responded every heart.”

Let no one think he can duly feel and understand the joy of Easter, and the triumph of Christ over death and the grave, unless he has previously felt and understood the solemnity of Lent, and, following the example of his blessed Lord, has striven against Satan and overcome him, and, in forty days of watching and praying purified his spirit and strengthened his faith. Every help was given at Broadoak to those who wished to watch and pray; frequent services at the church, which, standing as usual, with its open doors through the day, invited private prayer and meditation also. To those who follow through Passion week the record of sufferings,—which read as fresh as if,

instead of near two thousand years ago, they had happened but recently,—Easter comes as a real and earnest joy, and they feel in heart and soul the grand beauty of the chant,—so monotonous, so impressive,—“Christ our Passover is sacrificed for US, therefore let us keep the Feast.”

A full congregation met at the parish church of Broadoak, and after the last service the bells again sounded their tale of patience, resignation, and watchfulness.

Rogers was among the ringers that morning, and stood waiting for eight o'clock in the churchyard. At eight o'clock they were to ring the gladdest, most triumphant peal of the whole year. The glorious Easter sun was rising above the trees; shedding his grand smile upon this fair world in her early spring robes; the tender green of the young leaves, the colour creeping gradually over field and lane, spoke with great eloquence to the man who so recently had hovered between life and death, and, lying among strangers, had doubted if he should ever again behold the beauties of the spring, or stand again among living men in his own familiar place.

“Mates,” he said, turning round to the other men, “will you give me a peal on Tuesday for my

little wench? she is to marry the miller on Tuesday. I can't stand gold as the squire did, but I will give you each half-a-day's pay, and thank you kindly."

"Now look you here, Rogers," said the eldest ringer, "we looked to ring a muffled peal for *you* at Christmas time; we should have had no pay for that, no more will we take pay for the wedding peal. If you like to give us something to drink the young folks' healths in we won't make any objection, but we won't take money from you, boy; and we wish them good luck and a long life, and you too."

Tuesday came; a prouder bridegroom and a brighter bride never stood before the altar, and the bells rang right merrily for them.

There was a strange piece of news that week in Broadoak, which was that Mr. Pendally was made bankrupt and had fled the place; and then it came out, all he had wanted of young Edmonds was to borrow money of him.

And now, farewell to pretty Broadoak; happily there are many villages as happy, though few have such a parson as Mr. Hart; long may he be spared to the people who are to him as his children. I knew but one like him, and he was so bright and

beautiful a star upon earth that God took him early to shine in the firmament of heaven. May Broak-oak preserve its parson, and may success long attend the Ringing Club.





